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ABSTRACT

Riverside Community College (RCC), in Riverside, California, launched New Visions in 1999, a program designed to help welfare recipients prepare for college and move to better jobs. The program is a partnership between RCC and the Riverside Department of Public Social Services (DPSS). New Visions provides a 24-week program of academic instruction and support services, followed by up to five months of credit-bearing course work in an occupational mini-program. Participants in the program must have a high school diploma or GED and be working at least 20 hours a week. New Visions offers classes in remedial math, English, reading, basic computer skills, and career-life guidance. Class schedules are designed to accommodate students' work, childcare, and transportation needs. After graduation from the core program, students move into an occupational mini-program in jobs such as nursing, medical technology, early childhood education, police dispatching, and others. The study found that 97% of program volunteers were female, 31% were African American, 21% were Hispanic, 48% were earning wages of less than $6.00 per hour, and 66% had been on Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) for 12 months or longer. In addition, 41% volunteered for the program in order to earn a college degree or certificate. (Contains 27 references.) (Author/NB)

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The New Visions Evaluation

College as a Job Advancement Strategy: An Early Report on the New Visions Self-Sufficiency and Lifelong Learning Project

May 2000

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In August 1999, Riverside Community College (RCC), in Riverside County, California, launched an innovative program designed to prepare welfare recipients for college and help them move to better jobs. Set on a community college campus, New Visions provides a 24-week program of academic instruction and support services, followed by up to five months of credit-bearing course work in an occupational mini-program. In order to be eligible, clients must have a high school diploma or GED and be working at least 20 hours a week. The program is a partnership between RCC and the Riverside County Department of Public Social Services (RCDPSS).

Abt Associates Inc.'s five-year evaluation of New Visions is the first random assignment study of the effectiveness of a special college program for welfare recipients. The evaluation, which also includes a study of program implementation, will answer several important questions. The first is whether offering intensive supports encourages single parents on Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) to return to school after they have gone to work.[1] The second is whether making work a condition of education and training increases motivation to learn and enhances short-run job retention and advancement opportunities. The third is whether providing remedial education and support services helps participants to succeed in regular college programs, thereby increasing their access to higher-paying jobs over the long run.

Answers to these questions will be of interest nationwide, as well as within Riverside County. The New Visions demonstration comes at a time when, having created a strong imperative for welfare recipients to work, many states and localities are seeking ways to create pathways from entry-level employment to jobs that make families economically self-sufficient. Although there is little question that advanced job skills are critical to such transitions, not much is known about strategies seeking to expand access to higher education. Of particular interest is whether it is feasible to boost welfare recipients' college participation while enforcing the time limits and work requirements that nearly all states have adopted since the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunities Reconciliation Act (PRWORA).

[1] Although New Visions is not limited to single parents, very few adults from two-parent families have volunteered for the program. Accordingly, the substance of the demonstration essentially concerns the needs and responses of single parents.

This report reviews the literature on special programs for welfare recipients at two- and four-year colleges, describes the New Visions demonstration, and provides initial findings on program implementation and client experiences. The findings come at a very early juncture in the demonstration and are offered as an introduction to New Visions rather than as a preview of its likely outcomes.

New Visions Is the First Special College Program for Welfare Recipients To Be Rigorously Evaluated

Special college programs for welfare recipients received a substantial boost when the 1988 Family Support Act's Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training (JOBS) program made education and training (E&T) the cornerstone of the nation's welfare policies. Many states allowed welfare recipients to go to college under JOBS, and schools–particularly community colleges–developed a variety of innovative program designs. A small evaluation literature suggests students' experiences in these programs generally were positive, but there have been no rigorous studies of program effectiveness.

JOBS-era welfare-to-work experiments have generated useful findings on programs providing adult basic education, vocational training, employment services, and a mix of education and employment services. There is some evidence that mixed approaches have been more effective than single strategy models. However, college preparation and attendance have been at most a tiny sliver of the services in the programs studied to date. Therefore, the effects of policies and services promoting college for welfare recipients on economic and educational outcomes are unknown.

Under PRWORA, the shift to quick-employment welfare-to-work strategies initially led most states to severely restrict welfare recipients' access to higher education. More recently, states have been reconsidering how they might utilize the formidable resources of colleges and universities to promote job advancement for the many recipients who remain poor after they go to work. Several excellent reviews of the policy options within PRWORA are available to inform such efforts. However, little hard evidence on proven strategies is available to guide the design and implementation of actual programs.

The New Visions demonstration will help to fill this information void. The evaluation's process study is documenting the issues arising during implementation, assessing how RCC and RCDPSS respond to these issues, and examining how the services received by New Visions participants differ from those otherwise available. The impact study is using an experimental design to measure New Visions' effects on employment, education, and welfare outcomes for welfare recipients who volunteer for the program. As this design ensures that New Visions

exposure is the only systematic difference between randomly assigned treatment and control groups, measured differences in average outcomes between the two groups can be assumed to provide unbiased estimates of the program's true effects.

The New Visions Demonstration Is Testing a Mixed-Strategy Program

The goals of New Visions are to build educational competencies needed for longer-term academic success, while imparting skills useful at work in the short-term. By requiring students to maintain jobs for at least 20 hours a week, the county hopes to heighten students' appreciation of the practical value of classroom instruction, foster improved translation of new knowledge into earnings gains, and sustain participants' connections to the labor force.

The New Visions demonstration is only one part of a broader effort by Riverside County to provide E&T to welfare recipients who go to work. The county recently initiated a significant reformulation of its welfare-to-work approach. As in the past, all clients initially concentrate on finding jobs, with help from RCDPSS's widely-acclaimed employment service counselors. Clients who find jobs for at least 20 hours a week advance from Phase I to Phase II, where the emphasis shifts to promoting job retention and job advancement through education and training. In Phase II, special case managers link clients to a variety of E&T programs in the community.[2]

Phase II clients are allowed to volunteer for New Visions if they are interested in continuing their college educations and already have a high school diploma or GED. Following a one-week orientation, New Visions participants enter a ***24-week core program*** of academic instruction and career guidance. This program offers classes in remedial math, English, and reading; basic computer skills; and career-life guidance. Academic instruction relies heavily on applied learning and hands-on assignments drawn from work situations (e.g., math problems arising in varying occupations, resume and cover letter preparation) and other areas of daily living (e.g., interest on loans, income taxes). The guidance class concentrates on critical thinking and problem-solving skills, as well as study and communication skills needed for success at college, work, and home.

The core program offers a flexible schedule and individualized instruction delivered in a group setting. Classes are taught in three-hour time blocks each day, four days a week, with each block repeated three times daily to suit varying work, child care, and transportation needs.

[2] Clients advancing to jobs that allow them to leave welfare enter a third phase of the county's revised program. In Phase III, they receive mentoring and other services to strengthen job retention and advancement on a voluntary basis.

Small class sizes allow instructors to work with students on an individual basis. Lessons and assignments are structured so that students can move through the curriculum at their own pace.

After students graduate from the core program, New Visions staff help them choose an ***occupational mini-program*** at RCC. These programs last from one to five months and are available in occupations such as nursing, medical technician, early childhood education, corrections, police dispatching, human services, office administration, and manufacturing and construction. The programs certify students for entry-level jobs in a chosen occupation and provide academic credits that students can apply towards further certification or an associate degree.

During the Pilot Year, the New Visions Partners Successfully Implemented Several Key Components of the Program

RCC and RCDPSS made significant strides in implementing this innovative program over the first 18 months. Perhaps the most important accomplishment was bringing two very different institutions together in a working partnership–a key requirement for successful welfare-education initiatives. RCC and RCDPSS have demonstrated a strong mutual commitment to the program. Sustaining a disciplined team approach at all levels remains challenging, most notably in working on recruitment issues.

A second important achievement has been RCC's success in developing a strong core instructional program that blends academic remediation and real-world skills. The basic New Visions program successfully integrates academic instruction with workplace and other life skills training, provides highly-individualized instruction, moves students along through a manageable series of steps, and is delivered by an accommodating and dedicated staff.

A third accomplishment has been that RCC has created a highly-supportive social environment for New Visions students. Although less tangible than some other outcomes, a cohesive and motivating environment is an important attribute of successful social programs. New Visions' comfortable, on-campus location and encouraging staff provide a supportive buffer zone between challenging home and work situations and the additional demands of the regular college environment. The program's well-crafted guidance program creates strong bonds among students that strengthen their commitment to the program.

New Visions Still Faces Several Significant Challenges

Ambitious new programs usually take several years to develop fully, and New Visions has been no exception. After a year and a half, the program still faced three significant challenges: 1) meeting the program's recruitment goals, 2) bolstering supports to help participants balance work, home, and school responsibilities, and 3) strengthening connections between the core program and occupational mini-programs at RCC.

Recruitment has proven to be a far more difficult task than RCC and RCDPSS originally envisioned. It also is one of the most important challenges, since New Visions will be judged not only for its impacts on participants but also for its ability to engage a significant number of single parents in school while they are working at least part-time. Despite improved teamwork and several additional recruitment activities, the inflow of volunteers (about 40 clients every six weeks) remains substantially below the level expected (110 clients). On a positive note, there are many ways current efforts might be expanded, and RCC and RCDPSS are actively engaged in developing additional strategies.

One set of responses includes measures to increase program take-up by increasing the frequency and variety of communications about the program, bringing additional resources into play (e.g., expanding contributions by RCC and RCDPSS line staff, involving program participants and celebrities, and engaging an experienced marketing firm), and strengthening program supports that will help convince welfare recipients that they can handle school on top of already significant work and family responsibilities.

Although RCDPSS policy precludes direct referrals to specific E&T providers, Phase II case managers can make a substantial contribution to New Visions recruitment efforts.[3] In order to succeed in their efforts to engage clients in E&T generally, case managers will be assessing clients' interests and educational backgrounds and providing information on the benefits of E&T and the range of opportunities available in the community. Case managers are in a strong position to support RCC's recruitment efforts by identifying clients likely to succeed in college with extra help, presenting the case for college, and introducing clients to available resources for easing transitions to college. In the process, case managers could provide a substantial amount of information on New Visions and put interested clients in touch with RCC staff.

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[3] The agency describes its philosophy as a "push-pull" approach, in which case managers encourage clients to choose some E&T activity and providers are responsible for recruiting clients into specific programs. This strategy is essentially a market-based approach, with government performing two important functions. First, RCDPSS is committed to increasing clients' demand for E&T, which the agency believes to be vital to long-term job retention and advancement. Second, the county recognizes that in order for the market to operate efficiently, it must ensure that clients receive good information about alternative E&T opportunities and that providers have good access to their potential customers.

A second kind of response includes changes that would broaden program eligibility, which currently is limited to a small fraction (15 percent) of the overall caseload. Eligibility could be broadened by revising work requirements (e.g., allowing work study or reducing hours outright) or accepting clients without a high school diploma who test close to being GED-ready (and adding a GED component to the program).

In addition to strengthening the program's initial appeal, increasing supports to help New Visions participants manage their school, work, and parenting responsibilities could make a substantial difference in program retention. The current model provides mainly case management, with New Visions staff helping participants to coordinate school with their existing work, child care, and transportation options. Our early fieldwork suggests that this assistance, while helpful, may not be sufficient to overcome some of the most critical barriers, such as transportation and participants' concerns about child care availability and quality. In response, RCC and RCDPSS are seriously considering several services that could be very helpful, such as providing a van shuttle service to help participants attend New Visions, establishing on-campus work study and child care opportunities, and offering financial incentives for school that will allow participants to work less if they choose to do so.

Linkages between New Visions' core program and subsequent college course work also need to be strengthened. Over the past year, New Visions staff have begun to refer more students to RCC occupational mini-programs. Our impression is that participants need more concerted guidance and support throughout the 24-week program to enable them to continue in school while also handling the demands of improved job opportunities. RCC and RCDPSS staff must make college continuation a top priority and work especially closely with clients and each other in the weeks before–and after–graduation from the core instructional program.

Impressionistic Evidence Suggests that the Experiences of New Visions Participants Have Been Positive

Some early hints about participants' reasons for volunteering and their experiences in New Visions may be gleaned from observations of 143 clients who enrolled on a pilot basis in 1998-1999, before the official start of the demonstration. An intake survey found that these clients signed up for New Visions primarily to get help in obtaining a college degree or certificate (41 percent) or finding a better paying job (37 percent). When asked about their future plans, the vast majority (79 percent) expected to be both in college and working a year later (after the program would have ended). Such expectations coincide closely with New Visions' goal of promoting continuing college education for working single parents.

In a small group discussion, treatment group members said that the program's guidance classes had helped to create a supportive environment. One positive feature of this environment is its strong culture of peer support, which participants credit with providing valuable emotional and practical (e.g., transportation, child care) assistance. Students also had very positive reactions to New Visions' academic instruction, citing the program's faculty as the best teachers they had ever had. Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) scores show a substantial improvement in math skills, and a smaller improvement in language skills, for clients completing the core program.

For those participants who did not complete the core program, stronger program supports are needed to improve retention. One-third of volunteers attending orientation in the pilot group did not finish the program. Also, as mentioned above, linkages to occupational mini-programs were not fully implemented during the first year. Only two-in-ten program graduates entered such programs.

As a result of New Visions, clients were much more likely to participate in E&T. All treatment group members, but only a quarter of control group members, received an education or training assignment after volunteering for New Visions. In the last quarter of 1999, after most of the pilot group had finished New Visions, the percent receiving TANF was significantly higher among treatment (85 percent) than among control (72 percent) group members. Participation in New Visions may have led some New Visions students to forego full-time job opportunities and to remain on welfare longer than they would have had they not participated in the program.

Although interesting, the initial experiences of a small sample of participants during the pilot phase do not provide a very reliable indication of how New Visions impacts may unfold over time. Much will rest on the outcome of RCC's and RCDPSS's efforts to meet the recruitment challenge and on the degree to which RCC succeeds in strengthening the program's supports and its linkages to occupational mini-programs. Future reports will provide a fuller assessment of emerging New Visions strategies and more substantial analyses of clients' experiences.

College as a Job Advancement Strategy: An Early Report on The New Visions Self-Sufficiency and Lifelong Learning Project

Since passage of the landmark Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunities Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA), champions of the legislation have hailed declining welfare rolls and increasing job placements as evidence that the new policies are working. Although the exact contributions of welfare reform, other policy changes, and the tightest labor market in 30 years are uncertain, credible evaluations indicate that welfare reform has played an important role in increasing employment.[1] Most of these state reforms have embodied a version of "Work First," the quick-employment strategy whose success in Riverside County, California helped fuel widespread acceptance.[2]

More recently, it is becoming clear that getting recipients to work is only the first step on the difficult road to economic self-sufficiency. The vast majority of recipients have been able to find only low-wage jobs offering limited prospects for advancement. In 1997, the median hourly wage for former welfare recipients was only $6.61, and only 23 percent received health insurance through their employers (Loprest 1999). These realities have stimulated renewed interest in policies to "make work pay," on the one hand, and to develop welfare recipients' job skills, on the other.

In an era of declining wages for low-skill employment, a lack of education and training has become one of the most important barriers to job advancement. According to one study, about one-third of the welfare caseload has such low skills that even the most intensive education and training may not generate substantial earnings gains (Carnevale and Desrochers 1999). However, at least among the remaining two-thirds of the caseload, the right kinds of human capital investments may yield rich dividends. Higher education is likely to be an especially effective route to self-sufficiency for many in this group.

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[1] See impact reports based on random assignment evaluations of welfare reforms in Delaware (Fein *et al.* 1997), Florida (Bloom *et al.* 1999), Indiana (Fein *et al.* 1998), and Minnesota (Miller *et al.* 1997).

[2] For results of the GAIN evaluation, which included Riverside County, see Riccio *et al.* (1994).

There are several reasons why the college option deserves close scrutiny. Most importantly, the gap in earnings between those with and without college educations is large and steadily widening. In 1995, earnings were $15,970 for women with a high school degree, $17,962 for those with some college or an associate's degree, and $26,841 for those with a bachelors degree.[3] Studies have shown that earnings differences persist after controlling for other factors affecting college and enrollment.[4]

Second, although much attention has been focused on the low skills of a core of disadvantaged welfare recipients, many recipients are within striking range of being college-ready. Over half (52 percent) of welfare recipients have completed 12 or more years of school (Administration for Children and Families 2000). Carnevale and Desrochers (1999) have estimated that nearly one-third of adult welfare recipients already have the educational preparation needed for college work.

Third, compared with the challenges facing their more disadvantaged counterparts, those of recipients who have made it through high school generally are not as severe. If the potential value of college training is high and the barriers manageable, the cost-effectiveness of serving this population may be relatively high.

Riverside County is testing this thesis through an innovative community college program called the New Visions Self-Sufficiency and Lifelong Learning Project. New Visions provides intensive educational remediation and job skills training designed to create pathways to continuing community college course work and job advancement. While seeking to engage participants in college, the program also maintains a strong focus on employment by: 1) requiring participants to work at least 20 hours a week in an unsubsidized job while going to community college, 2) teaching skills needed for job success, 3) providing intensive group and individual guidance, and 4) offering job search and development assistance. New Visions is located on the campus of Riverside Community College (RCC), which developed the program in partnership with the Riverside County Department of Public Social Services (RCDPSS).

New Visions is one expression of a more general shift in RCDPSS's welfare-to-work program, from a Work First model to an approach the county calls "Work Plus." The most significant change in the program is that after welfare recipients find unsubsidized jobs for at least 20 hours a week, the program encourages them to participate in education and training. If successful, Riverside County's experience could contribute to the emergence of a new national

[3] See Gruber (1998, p. 276).

[4] Pascarella (1999) provides a review of this research.

welfare-to-work paradigm in which labor force attachment and human capital are treated as complementary, rather than rival, strategies.

In 1999, Abt Associates Inc. began a five-year evaluation of New Visions. The evaluation is assessing program implementation and using a random assignment design to measure impacts on participants' employment, welfare receipt, and educational attainment. To date there has been relatively little formal evaluation of special programs designed to engage welfare recipients in college. Accordingly, policy makers have had little basis for deciding whether to create such programs, and practitioners have had only limited information to help them work through the design and implementation issues.

Sections I and II of this report review the literature on special college programs and describe the New Visions program and evaluation. Sections III and IV identify initial implementation lessons and examine early experiences of a small group of clients involved in the program's pilot phase.

I. RESEARCH ON HIGHER EDUCATION FOR WELFARE RECIPIENTS

There has been relatively little evaluation of interventions designed to boost welfare recipients' attendance at two- and four-year colleges and no previous random assignment studies of program effectiveness. For clues to the potential effects of such programs, it therefore is necessary to look at studies of other kinds of education and training (E&T) services.

One important recent evaluation provides some evidence that E&T services can benefit welfare clients with a high school diploma or equivalent. The National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies (NEWWS) found that E&T produced short-term economic gains for recipients with high school-level academic preparation, but not for those with less preparation (Hamilton *et al.* 1997). Among the former, NEWWS found *larger* impacts for programs providing *both* education and employment services than for those providing *only* quick-employment services after two years.

A variety of other random assignment demonstrations have tested E&T services such as basic education, high school, GED preparation, short-term classroom vocational training, and on-the-job training (Strawn 1998, 1999). Traditional adult basic education classes alone typically have not had substantial impacts on earnings. Like NEWWS, other demonstrations show that the most effective E&T programs appear to have emphasized employment preparation and work skills in addition to academic subjects.

In sum, past experiments suggest that welfare recipients with high school credentials may be especially well-poised to benefit from E&T, especially in mixed-strategy program designs. College has been only a slice of the services offered in previously tested programs, however, and there is little direct evidence on strategies for promoting college.[5]

Special College Programs Under JOBS

Although a minor line in research, college was a major activity for welfare recipients under the 1988 Family Support Act, whose Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training (JOBS) program made E&T the cornerstone of national welfare policy. All but three states allowed recipients to attend college in fulfillment of their JOBS employment and training participation requirements. By FY 1992, college accounted for 18 percent of JOBS employment and training participation nationally.[6]

Impressionistic evidence indicates that many colleges developed special programs to promote welfare recipients' college attendance, although the exact number of such programs is unknown. For example, a survey of JOBS participants attending college in six states found that one quarter were in special programs (Gittell *et al.* 1993). These programs provided widely-varying mixtures of remedial education, financial assistance, counseling, and other support services (Kates 1995). Only a few studies on the design and operation of individual programs have been performed.

One such study examined five programs run by the City University of New York (CUNY), in partnership with the city's Human Resources Administration (Gittell *et al.* 1996). Three of these programs served welfare recipients only, whereas two also served a wider population of disadvantaged students. The programs offered counseling, tutoring, financial assistance, and other academic and personal support services. They differed in the selectivity of their admissions policies, in the intensity of special academic and support services provided, and in the range of courses open to students. For example, one program (REACH) provided a

[5] Although the Portland NEWWS site featured services provided by a community college and achieved some of the largest impacts of a welfare-to-work program to date, it is not possible to tell whether E&T at the college contributed to impacts for participants with high school diplomas/GEDs, since the program also placed a substantial emphasis on placement in jobs with better wages and increased work experience and on-the-job training (see Scrivener *et al.* 1998, Appendix Table D.4). Although a somewhat higher fraction (nine percentage points) of experimental than control clients received some vocational education, experimentals who did participate averaged substantially fewer hours of instruction than their control group counterparts. Finally, much of the vocational education apparently was in special, non-credit-bearing courses that did not count toward an associate degree.

[6] Committee on Ways and Means (1994, p. 352). Among the roughly half of JOBS participants with high school credentials who account for this activity, the percent in college can be assumed to have been roughly twice as high (i.e., 36 percent).

customized curriculum leading to certificates in nursing and other public service careers, as well as supportive services (child care, transportation, lunch expenses) from the welfare agency. Another (Family College) allowed students to take a wider range of courses and operated a special on-campus elementary school (K through 2nd grades) for students' children. The following are among the key lessons from this research:

- Programs must offer educational remediation because many participants have been out of school for a long time and need to improve their basic skills. Up-front remediation can help minimize difficulties later, but ongoing needs for academic assistance should be expected.

- Supportive services are vital to student retention. One crucial service is good child care, preferably on campus or nearby. Help arranging and paying for transportation is especially important in helping participants juggle their responsibilities as parents, workers, and students. Providing support in negotiating the school financial assistance maze, and providing assistance with short-term financial crises also can be important for retention.

- A strong peer group environment can strengthen students' motivation and self-esteem, and may thus engender in participants a greater sense of attachment to college.

Although the CUNY and other (e.g., Hollenbeck *et al.* 1997, Boldt 1999) studies reported positive outcomes for program completers–both in isolation and in comparison with various groups of non-participants–the true impacts of the programs studied are unknown. Simple outcome statistics do not tell us how many recipients the program helped beyond the number that would have succeeded on their own. Non-experimental comparison groups potentially offer a way to benchmark the gains, but substantial biases can affect such estimates if the comparisons fail to control completely for non-program differences between groups. Careful sensitivity testing can help to establish the accuracy of non-experimental impact estimates, but none of the cited studies reported such testing.

PRWORA and Higher Education

The 1996 enactment of PRWORA accelerated a shift from E&T to quick-employment strategies that already was underway. Substantial credit for this shift is due to an influential random assignment study of California's JOBS program, which found the largest positive impacts on employment to date in a forceful employment program run by Riverside County (Riccio *et al.* 1994). After 1996, state policies were affected principally by time limits and PRWORA policies that required states to make job search and other work activities the focus of

their services.[7] The new national policies led many states to restrict access to college in their TANF programs, and the number of welfare recipients attending college declined substantially (Greenberg *et al.* 1999, Gruber 1998). .

More recently there have been signs of renewed interest in the college option (and E&T more generally), as states have begun to recognize both the limits of quick-employment, or "Work First" strategies, and seize opportunities to exploit flexibility in federal policies (Greenberg *et al.* 1999, Schmidt 1998).[8] In a July 1999 survey of 42 states' policies, the Center for Law and Social Policy found that 35 states allowed welfare recipients to meet at least some required TANF work activity hours through college and that 12 states were willing to count college up to all required work activity hours (Greenberg *et al.* 1999).[9] The details of these policies and the extent of states' active involvement in program development are highly variable across states (Grubb *et al.* 1999, Greenberg *et al.* 1999, Kates 1999, Price and Greene 1999).

Some states, like Illinois and Maine, not only count college as a regular TANF work activity, but also stop recipients' time clocks if they are making satisfactory progress in school. At the other extreme, states like Connecticut and Indiana do not count college as a work activity. In the middle fall states that count college as a TANF activity–either partly (e.g., California) or

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[7] PRWORA levies financial penalties when states fail to meet specified work activity participation rates. For FY 2000, 40 percent of all non-exempt families must participate in approved work activities for at least 30 hours per week, and 90 percent of two-parent families must participate for at least 35 hours a week. Work activities are defined to include mainly employment activities such as job search, job readiness training, community work experience, and subsidized and unsubsidized employment. The rules allow education only under limited circumstances, with college allowed only if it fits requirements for vocational education and job skills training. No more than 30 percent of recipients can be either engaged in vocational education or a parent under age 20 who is in high school. Vocational training is counted for no more than 12 months. Jobs skills training counts only if it is directly related to employment and comes in addition to 20 hours of another approved work activity (Greenberg *et al.* 1999, p. 11).

[8] Federal TANF funds and state maintenance of effort (MOE) funds can be used to support tuition, academic support services, and other program costs. Within TANF programs, states have flexibility to count a certain number of hours of college work as either job skills or vocational training without risking a federal penalty for not meeting work participation rates. Also, most states could assign many clients to college programs without penalty since they are exceeding required work participation rates. Furthermore, states are not required to count clients receiving assistance through separate state programs funded through MOE funds or when federal TANF funds are spent on so-called "non-assistance" (essentially other assistance provided to former welfare recipients or other low-income persons who are not receiving regular cash payments). In addition, states are not obligated to count assistance through separate state program or TANF non-assistance against federal time limits. Illinois recently exploited this opportunity and "stops the clock" for cash assistance recipients who are attending school full-time.

[9] Although there has been no careful statistical study of special college programs for welfare recipients, presentations at a September 1999 conference on "Welfare Reform and the College Option" at Gallaudet University in Washington D.C. suggest that a number of colleges are hosts to such programs. Community colleges have been especially active in developing welfare-to-work programs. In a 1998 survey, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) found that more than half (54 percent) of the nation's community colleges were operating welfare-to-work programs (Kienzl 1999). However, the AACC survey did not distinguish efforts to engage welfare recipients with high school backgrounds in regular community college programs from the wider range of welfare-to-work services at community colleges. Similarly, Grubb *et al.* (1999) provide a useful analysis of community college programs for welfare recipients but do not distinguish college-track programs from employment and training services provided to recipients with more diverse educational backgrounds.

TANF and Post-Secondary Education in Three States

California policies count post-secondary education as CalWORKS (California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids) welfare-to-work activities under certain circumstances. The rules allow students who already are in school when they enter the welfare-to-work program (Self-Initiated Programs, or SIPs) to count this towards their 32 hours of work activity, provided that counties deem SIPs as likely to lead to employment. Otherwise, counties have substantial leeway in deciding whether and how to allow education and training. The CalWORKS rules allow recipients to receive welfare-to-work services for up to 24 months, after which counties may require participants who are not working to enter into community service employment. CalWORKS also has established a special grant program through which the State Chancellor for Community Colleges distributes funding to community colleges for support services and instruction to welfare recipients. The program spent $73 million in school year 1998-99, its first full year, and served 46,521 students (California Community Colleges CalWORKS Status Report for 1998). Grants may be used to fund curriculum development, child care, work-study, job development and placement services, and coordination with other agencies. So far, there is little detailed information on program designs at individual colleges.

In 1999, ***Kentucky***'s legislature passed legislation to promote welfare recipients' access to post-secondary education. One million dollars was allotted to create and fund college programs for K-TAP (Kentucky Transitional Assistance Program) recipients. The Women in Transition program at the University of Louisville is one such program. The state allows Women in Transition clients to use work-study jobs to meet Kentucky's TANF work requirements, which require all recipients to devote at least 20 hours a week to work activities other than school. Students are allowed to earn up to $2,500 per semester in work-study positions and provided other services to support school attendance.

Maine's Parents as Scholars (PaS) program provides people who meet TANF eligibility requirements the chance to attend college. Created in 1997 as a separate state (MOE) program, PaS "stops the clock" while students pursue college degrees leading to better jobs. In the PaS program, students receive monthly cash assistance in the same amount as they would under TANF, and also benefit from support services such as child care and transportation. Tuition expenses are covered through financial aid. Clients are eligible for PaS if they are eligible for TANF and meet academic requirements but lack the skills to support their families at 85 percent of Maine's median family income. To maintain eligibility for PaS, a participant must complete during the first two years of study 20 hours/week of work activity, which includes school and study time as well as paid, unpaid, volunteer, or internship work. After two years, students must work 20 hours/week in addition to the school requirements. In early 1999, the program had about 1,000 participants; up to 2,000 are allowed.

completely (e.g., Delaware)–but do not stop time clocks. State involvement in special services and programs to promote college also is highly variable. For example, welfare agencies in Washington and Maine have taken a more active role in working with education agencies, colleges, and industry organizations to develop programs. Other states (e.g., Kentucky) have concentrated mainly on creating the necessary enabling policies and funding. Some states also are beginning to consider extending E&T after families leave cash assistance, under less-restrictive rules governing so-called TANF "non-assistance" (see Greenberg *et al.* 1999). The box appearing on the previous page summarizes several states' policies in greater detail.

For their part, colleges also face many choices in thinking about how to promote post-secondary education. Some may decide to focus only on college preparation, whereas others may wish to offer a wider range of welfare-to-work services. Related to this choice is the decision about whether programs should focus on longer-term educational attainment, short-term job advancement, or both objectives. Some colleges may want to work through agency referrals, whereas others may undertake their own marketing and recruitment efforts. Programs may decide to offer special instructional programs or mainstream welfare recipients into regular college classes. Finally, supportive services will be key for many programs, but there are many possible service models, and little is known about their merits.

II. THE NEW VISIONS DEMONSTRATION

The New Visions demonstration is studying the implementation and measuring impacts of one response to promoting college for welfare recipients in the new policy environment. This section describes the program and its evaluation.

The Underlying Vision

New Visions reflects the shared belief of RCC's president and RCDPSS's director that education must be the next step to self-sufficiency after welfare recipients take the first step of going to work. Recognizing that success at college and success at work require many similar skills, the two leaders decided to develop a program that would "introduce the individual both to the world of work and to the world of learning simultaneously" (Rotella 1997).

The program mixes two distinct philosophies. One is that education provides the most certain pathway to long-term self-sufficiency. A second is that working can enhance students' motivation to learn and can more rapidly translate education into economic gains. Accordingly, New Visions seeks both to reinforce employment successes in the short-run and pave the way

to more substantial economic advancement through college education in the longer term. The program's credo–"get a job, keep a job, get a career"–captures this outlook.

Program Context

A large, diverse county, Riverside shares borders with highly urbanized portions of several counties (Los Angeles, Orange, San Bernardino and San Diego) in the Los Angeles basin and contains vast, sparsely populated desert extending eastward from Palm Springs to the Arizona border. Riverside's 1998 population of 1,478,838 makes it California's sixth largest county. The county's population and economy both have been growing. Population increased 26 percent from 1990 to 1998 and is projected to continue to grow in the coming decade. Recent economic growth has contributed to a substantial welfare caseload decline, from 38,764 families in 1995 to 25,321 in 1999. At 5.5 percent in 1999, Riverside County's unemployment rate remains somewhat higher than the overall rates for California (5.2 percent) and the U.S. (4.2) in 1999.

New Visions is one part of a much broader change in Riverside County's welfare-to-work program that commenced in 1997. Previously, the county's well known work program focused almost exclusively on providing job search and other assistance aimed at moving clients quickly to work. Riverside's revised "Work Plus" model adds E&T and other services after clients succeed in attaching to employment. The program moves clients though three distinct service phases.

Phase I services are essentially the same as in the previous quick-employment approach, with RCDPSS case managers and clients focusing almost exclusively on job entry. Clients remain in Phase I until they are working for at least 20 hours a week. While in Phase I, most clients meet their 32 hours of required CalWORKS participation through employment services such as job club, job search, and unsubsidized employment.[10] After finding jobs providing at least 20 hours of work a week, they advance to Phase II, where the emphasis shifts to education and job advancement.

In Phase II, recipients work with special case managers, who encourage them to take advantage of varying education and training opportunities in the community. RCC's New Visions program is one Phase II service option. Other options include adult basic education,

[10] Phase I clients also can use the following to meet the work requirements: mental health and substance abuse counseling, and educational activities such as adult basic education, GED preparation, English as a Second Language classes, and "Self-Initiated Programs" (see text box, page 7).

vocational training, and on-the-job training at a variety of proprietary schools and community colleges (including other RCC programs). The county still requires recipients to meet the first 20 of their required 32 hours of CalWORKS activity through unsubsidized employment, but Phase II allows them to meet the remaining 12 hours through E&T.

Under CalWORKS rules, recipients can receive welfare-to-work services only for a maximum of 24 months, after which counties may require those who are not working at least 32 hours a week to take a community service job. To encourage education and training, RCDPSS allows recipients to continue in school after 24 months if they are working at least 20 hours a week, and counts this participation towards the 32-hour requirement.

Although most Phase II activities are funded through the county's TANF grant, New Visions' funding comes from a special state program for community colleges. Under this program, the state's Chancellor for Community Colleges provides funding directly to community colleges for services to welfare recipients (see text box on page 7).[11]

Clients remain in Phase II until they either fall below the 20-hour level or leave welfare. Clients whose employment falls below the 20-hour level are returned to Phase I. Recipients who find employment that allows them to leave welfare enter Phase III of the county's revised program. In Phase III, they receive mentoring and other services intended to foster job retention and advancement on a voluntary basis.

Program Design and Services

New Visions is located on RCC's main campus, where it has its own classrooms, office space, and computer lab. The program consists of two instructional stages. In the first, students receive remedial education, training in computer skills, and career guidance. In the second, they enroll in occupational mini-programs that provide regular college credit, certificates for entry-level employment in an occupation, and a base on which to build further college studies.

Stage One. The first component includes ***24 weeks of basic education, SCANS skills***[12] ***instruction, and guidance***. During this period, students attend special courses in English, math,

[11] RCC's CalWORKS grant also supports tuition and services for several hundred additional students besides New Visions participants.

[12] New Visions seeks to impart skills identified by the Department of Labor Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS). SCANS skills encompass five competency areas (using resources, working with others, gathering and using information, understanding systems, and using technology) and specify three skill areas associated with these competencies (basic, thinking, and interpersonal).

reading, office computer skills, and guidance. To help students build an academic record, the program lists credits for these classes on the official RCC transcripts. However, only the guidance class credits count as regular credit toward an associate degree.

A one-week orientation is used to introduce students to the campus and New Visions, make sure support services are in place, assess academic needs through testing and counseling, and complete financial aid and other paperwork. Workplace literacy skills, SCANS workplace competencies, and life management skills are integrated throughout the curriculum. English and math instructors explained their approach to applied skills as follows:

> *The New Visions English classes relate the discipline to the workplace through anecdotes, examples, and "real life" applications... For example, if [the instructor] is teaching about description, she might have students read an article about what employers look at during a job interview. If she is teaching about process analysis, she might have students discuss their good and bad training experiences. Examples [used] in class include actual workplace documents, such as letters, memos, and flyers... Recent writing assignments have included a resume, a job application letter, a letter of praise/complaint addressed to a business, a comparison... of child care providers... and a goals statement.*
>
> *The heart of [the math] curriculum is basic... computation–fractions, decimals, and percents, with a bit of algebra. But for these areas, we do hundreds of applied problems from business and industry. For example, problems might involve measurement (e.g., in carpentry), or costs associated with a retail business, or problems involving mileage (e.g., concerns of a trucking company)... [L]essons...also help students as consumers, [by working through sample problems involving calculating] loan costs... taxes... balancing a checkbook... and investing.*

Although classes typically begin with a short lecture, the majority of each class period is devoted to self-paced work on lessons and assignments. Instructors work closely with individual students, providing individualized instruction, making assignments, and monitoring progress.

New Visions' "guidance" classes provide instruction in study skills, career exploration, and time management. The curriculum also emphasizes SCANS job skills such as reasoning, creative thinking, and decision-making. The classes stress group discussion and are organized to encourage the development of a supportive peer environment.

The academic program offers a flexible schedule and highly individualized instruction. New Visions students attend class for three hours each day between Monday and Thursday (for

a total of 12 hours of instruction) and are encouraged to use the computer lab for study and homework on Friday and Saturday. Each day, classes are repeated during three different three-hour time blocks (at 12-3, 3-6, and 6-9 o'clock). Students may choose the time slot most convenient to their work, child care, and transportation schedules, and they may change slots as their needs change.

Every six weeks, a new cohort enters the program. After orientation, incoming students join ongoing students in classes. The new students work on the same sequence of assignments as ongoing students. Small classes make it possible to provide the highly individualized instruction needed to manage students at differing stages in the curriculum. Students who drop out before completing New Visions are encouraged to return when they are ready. Instructors start re-entrants at an appropriate stage, based on the assignments they had completed prior to dropping out.

Clients meet regularly with New Visions counseling staff to review their progress, conduct career exploration, and work on personal growth issues. Staff help each client to arrange child care and other supportive services, develop educational and professional goals, and formulate plans for activities following the basic skills segment of the program. The main focus of this planning is continuing college studies.

Stage Two. In the second part of New Visions, staff encourage participants to enroll in one of a variety of ***occupational mini-programs*** at RCC. RCDPSS Phase II case managers must approve the chosen programs. These programs offer short-term training designed to certify students for entry-level employment in fields of interest. Unlike course work in Stage One, class work in the mini-programs does count as regular college credit.

Depending on the field, the mini-programs typically range from one to five months in duration. Training is available in a wide range of occupations, including nursing, medical technician, early childhood education, corrections, police dispatching, human services, office administration, and manufacturing and construction. Students also have the option of enrolling in regular certificate programs and other RCC courses if approved by their RCDPSS Phase II case managers.

Program Staffing, Management, and Coordination

RCC's Vice President for Planning and Development has overall responsibility for the program. Within this office, the Dean of Workforce Preparation administers New Visions, as well as services to CalWORKS recipients who are not in New Visions. Day-to-day management

is the job of the New Visions Coordinator. The current Coordinator also provides counseling and case management services directly to students, along with another staff guidance counselor.

Five faculty members teach specially-designed courses in office computer skills, English, math, reading, and guidance. Most of the faculty also teach other courses at RCC. A half-time Financial Aid clerk facilitates students' transition to regular academic programs at RCC and to other colleges and universities. She does this by helping students to access financial aid and other services from RCC's Financial Aid office, as well as from other state and federal programs.

To ensure that the program is focusing on workplace skills and training relevant to local employers, program managers and a Job Development Specialist maintain relationships with the county's Economic Development Agency and local business leaders. The New Visions job developer informs employers, business organizations, and representatives from other local workforce agencies about New Visions.

RCC's Vice President for Planning and Development and RCDPSS's Deputy Director for Planning and Evaluation have been closely involved in planning and ongoing coordination and meet regularly to discuss emerging issues. Other managers and line staff in the two agencies also are in frequent contact. RCDPSS Phase II case managers encourage clients to pursue further education and training, inform them of New Visions, and provide assistance with transportation, child care, and other work-related expenses and services. RCDPSS plans soon to station a case worker in the New Visions Resource Center, where a computer provides secure access to the welfare agency's case management system. RCC staff have primary responsibility for New Visions recruitment, curriculum design, and day-to-day program operations.

New Visions staff also have established linkages with an array of public and private community service agencies and refer participants to these agencies as needed. Services include supports such as housing, substance abuse treatment, and rape crisis services that can help students to address workplace, family, and personal problems that can disrupt school and work.

Evaluation

Abt Associates Inc. is studying New Visions' implementation and impacts over a five-year period. The evaluation's process study examines how RCC and RCDPSS implemented the program, and how the services participants receive differ from services that they would otherwise use. The impact study uses an experimental design to measure New Visions' effects on employment and earnings, welfare reliance, and educational attainment.

Process study. In the evaluation's process study, evaluation staff are: 1) documenting the program model as it is actually implemented; 2) describing and measuring the program's net treatment–that is, the program experiences of enrollees in New Visions compared with what their experiences would have been otherwise; and 3) bringing this information to bear in explaining the program's successes and failures. The process study also is assessing how the program's surrounding policy and socioeconomic environment affect its design and implementation.

Several important questions underlie the New Visions process study. Can working parents be convinced to shoulder college in addition to work and parenting responsibilities? Will New Visions be able to sustain participation and provide effective academic preparation? Can services to foster short-term job advancement be designed in a way that does not discourage longer term academic involvement? Information on whether and how the program succeeds in meeting these challenges will be useful both in improving New Visions and in designing efforts elsewhere.

Impact study. The evaluation's impact study is measuring New Visions' effectiveness in: 1) increasing welfare recipients' earnings, 2) decreasing welfare reliance, and 3) fostering college attainment. The design calls for randomly assigning 1,100 New Visions volunteers to treatment and control groups over a two-year period. Those in the treatment group are enrolled in the program, whereas those in the control group are allowed to receive only services otherwise available. Abt Associates is measuring employment, welfare, and education outcomes for both groups over time using a variety of administrative and survey data sources. Impacts are estimated by calculating differences in average outcomes for the two groups.[13]

One set of research questions concerns whether the program increases participants' earnings through jobs that pay better, provide longer hours and greater stability, and lead to upward mobility. Another line of inquiry addresses whether the program reduces welfare payments, increases welfare exits, and reduces welfare recidivism. A third set of analyses measures New Visions' effectiveness at increasing college enrollment, credits earned, and certificates and degrees received.

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[13] Two features of the experimental design deserve special comment. One is that the experiment was designed to measure impacts only for clients who met New Visions' eligibility rules and volunteered to be in the program. The strength of this design is its power to isolate the direct effects of program participation. However, the design will not capture any indirect effects on behavior that may occur before clients actually volunteer. For example, the New Visions offer might encourage ineligible clients to complete a GED or increase their work effort in order to qualify for the program. New Visions' marketing efforts also may convince some eligible clients to return to school without volunteering for the program, and this impact also would not be captured by the experiment. The evaluation will look at less rigorous evidence on the existence of such effects. For example, survey interviews will ask New Visions volunteers whether the program led them to finish their high school degrees or GEDs, or take jobs, sooner than they were planning to do so.

A second important point is that impacts do not represent the effects of participating in New Visions compared with no educational and supportive services, but, rather, the incremental effects of a particular college attachment model compared with other RCDPSS Phase II services. Arriving at a judicious interpretation of the impact findings thus will require that we analyze E&T services received by the control group.

Experimental analyses will examine the time path over which any impacts emerge, in relation to the predominant pathways recipients follow through the program. As a mixed-services strategy, one possibility is that New Visions will bring positive earnings impacts faster than models devoted exclusively to fostering post-secondary education. Alternatively, some New Visions participants may choose to concentrate more heavily on school than on work in the short-run, delaying job advancement and the arrival of positive earnings impacts.

Although random assignment did not begin officially until August 1999, the program operated as a pilot–with random assignment–over the prior year. Section IV of this report provides preliminary analyses of the experiences of 143 clients who enrolled in the pilot in 1998-1999. These findings must be regarded as preliminary, since the program was not yet fully developed, sample sizes are very small, and outcomes could be observed only over a short follow-up period. Before turning to these analyses, we review some preliminary lessons on program implementation.

III. Early New Visions Implementation Experiences

New Visions has not been built from a finished blueprint. Rather it has grown out of an initial program plan developed by RCC and RCDPSS in 1997. Many aspects of the program were well-specified from the start, but others were initially less developed. Generally speaking, the developed pieces of the New Visions model–including most aspects of the program's curriculum–were implemented smoothly for the 1998-1999 academic year, when the program operated on a pilot basis. These elements of the program model, many of which have been modified as a result of program experience, continued to operate smoothly in the 1999-2000 academic year.

Some components of New Visions were not addressed thoroughly in the planning phase, mainly because their importance to the program's success was not fully appreciated at that time. Notable among these components is program recruitment, which has proven to be far more challenging than anyone anticipated.

This section begins by briefly describing the New Visions implementation process during the 1998-1999 and 1999-2000 academic years. We then discuss four lessons on program implementation that may be of wider applicability.

Implementing New Visions

Most aspects of the New Visions model delineated during the program's planning period were fully implemented during the first academic year. Notable among these elements are the various components of the program's first instructional phase, which offers educational remediation integrated with training in workplace and life skills. During the 1998-1999 academic year, both the curriculum and the instruction methods used in the program's first phase received high marks from everyone involved–including students, staff, and administrators. Improved student achievement scores (discussed in Section IV) and consistently positive employer comments support this assessment. As a result, in the program's second year, this part of the New Visions model was modified in only minor ways.

Two other elements of the program model that were fully specified during the planning period and then smoothly implemented during the first year of operations are the following:

- ***Counseling.*** Staff were readily available to participants on campus during the 1998-1999 academic year. Participants reported that the counselors' practical advice and assistance, as well as their personal support, far exceeded what participants had experienced in other school or work settings before starting New Visions. No noteworthy changes in this program component have been made in the second year.

- ***Supplies and other college expenses.*** Books and other supplies have been made available to participants, at no cost, from the outset. Most books were loaned from the program's resource room, an inviting facility where participants can get help from staff, use equipment, and borrow from a library of books, brochures, and documents. Tuition and all college fees have been covered by RCC and RCDPSS since program operations began.

Inevitably, some aspects of the New Visions model were only sketched out during the planning phase. One such program component was recruitment. Eligible welfare recipients were expected to be easily drawn by the opportunity to go to college–with studies geared to their situations and all expenses paid–and to complete both phases of the New Visions program on their way to high-paying employment and further college education. Accordingly, little attention was paid to recruitment prior to the start of program operations. Recruitment has proven to be much more difficult than expected. As a result, a more explicit recruitment plan was developed during the summer between the 1998-1999 and 1999-2000 academic years. However, recruitment continued to fall short of expectations during the first two months of the 1999-2000 academic year. This resulted in further changes, which are discussed under Lesson 1 below.

The second instructional phase, which provides occupational training courses while participants continue working, was outlined during the planning period, but not fully implemented until the second academic year. Few New Visions students enrolled in these mini-training programs before the program's second year. In part, this reflects the simple fact that participants did not begin completing the program's first phase and moving on to its second phase until the second half of the 1998-1999 academic year. It also reflects the fact that only one program (Certified Nurse Assistant) was available to New Visions students at that time. Changes in the second year have included developing linkages to several additional existing RCC mini-programs, designating a single RCDPSS caseworker to approve participant choices of RCC training programs and increasing the New Visions job developer's involvement during the first instructional phase.

A final area where the New Visions model only began to take shape during the planning period was services to address participants' complex child care and transportation needs. The need to provide participants with child care and transportation assistance was well-recognized during the program planning period, and both RCC and RCDPSS have funding and existing procedures for providing such help. However, the full dimensions of participants' needs for assistance were not yet visible. RCC was accustomed to helping low-income students get to the college for classes, for example, but not to enabling students to get to off-campus jobs. RCDPSS staff had grappled with welfare recipients' home-work-child care transportation triangles but had rarely encountered the complicated transportation and child care configurations that were created when single parents who rarely live close to campus try to get to school four days a week while also working 20 to 40 hours a week and meeting their parenting responsibilities. New Visions has experimented with a variety of child care and transportation arrangements on a case-by-case basis.

Early Implementation Lessons

Although the New Visions program is still developing, the challenges the partners have encountered to date are characteristic of what can be expected in similar efforts elsewhere and, for that reason, their experiences may be of wider interest. Here, we offer four preliminary lessons on what welfare agencies and colleges should anticipate in designing programs to engage current and former welfare recipients in college. For each lesson, we *describe the nature of the challenge, recount how RCC and RCDPSS have responded to date*, and try to *identify implications for design and implementation* that may be applicable across a wider set of program models.

Lesson 1. Programs Like New Visions Can Anticipate the Need for an Intensive Marketing and Outreach Effort to Convince Working Parents to Return to School

Increased employment opportunities, along with Work First policies and financial necessity, are leading many more welfare recipients to work full-time. When combined with parenting responsibilities, college may make many feel that their plates are too full. In addition, some likely do not fully appreciate the benefits of college or believe that it is financially or academically feasible for them to attend.

As mentioned above, the Riverside partners initially underestimated the difficulty recruitment entailed. With enrollment falling substantially below targets, RCC and RCDPSS staff have steadily intensified their efforts. In the first (pilot) year, efforts consisted mainly of presentations by RCC staff at GAIN career fairs and RCDPSS mailing an invitation letter to clients. During the second (first operational) year, RCC and RCDPSS staff have forged a stronger team approach, implemented additional outreach, and begun work on a series of further measures. The changes have included special presentations by New Visions staff to GAIN clients and case managers, training a former participant to make presentations, an intensive telephone outreach campaign, and holding New Visions family events (called "Tiger Tailgate" parties) on the RCC campus. For its part, RCDPSS has implemented a series of operational changes designed to support Phase II case managers' efforts to promote education and training generally and has provided administrative support for several New Visions recruitment efforts.[14]

Expanded outreach has helped to maintain enrollment at about 20 students per cohort (with 20 also being assigned to the control group); but this number remains substantially below the original target of 50. Maintaining the intensity of current efforts, along with strengthening efforts to promote education in the RCDPSS Phase II program more generally, should establish New Visions more securely over time and possibly increase enrollment. However, additional measures also appear to be needed. In response, RCDPSS has conducted focus groups to explore clients' interests in, and barriers to, education, and worked with RCC to develop additional strategies. Surveying this experience, several lessons already seem clear.

First, it is likely to take ***multiple avenues of communication and frequent repetition*** before many recipients will be moved to act. Identifying eligible clients, one fundamental need, may be more difficult than one would think. Problems arose at RCDPSS in operationalizing both the employment and education criteria for New Visions eligibility. Senior agency staff discovered that Phase I case managers were not referring some clients working 20 hours per

[14] General measures include establishing a toll-free line for clients interested in obtaining more information about E&T, developing a consent form for clients interested in receiving information from providers, creating a video on educational opportunities for use in the welfare offices, and involving Phase II staff in Phase I job clubs. RCDPSS also has supported RCC's recruitment efforts by sending out mailings on New Visions for the college.

week to Phase II case managers, and the automated welfare information system's educational attainment fields proved to be missing for many clients. Since then, the agency has taken steps to address these problems.

RCC staff have found it difficult to reach eligible clients due to a combination of organizational constraints and resource limitations. California state confidentiality laws prevent RCDPSS from sharing information about public information recipients without their consent. In response, RCDPSS developed a consent form that clients a way to indicate their willingness to be contacted by RCC or other providers. However, because it is voluntary, the consent process has generated only partial lists of New Visions-eligible clients.[15] RCC staff used these lists in a series of telephone outreach campaigns.

A potentially easier way to reach eligible clients is to contact them while they are in the welfare office. RCDPSS has encouraged RCC staff to visit its offices for this purpose. In part because there have been limited opportunities to meet with Phase II clients in group settings, the agency has encouraged New Visions staff to make presentations at Phase I job club meetings. It has proven difficult for RCC's small staff to cover these meetings consistently, given their number and varying office locations. Recognizing that there were few opportunities for providers to meet with groups of Phase II clients, RCDPSS sponsored a number of Phase II "Career Fairs." Although turnout at these meetings was limited, New Visions was able to recruit some clients through the Career Fairs. Finally, in the second year, RCDPSS has helped by mailing invitations to a series of family events on the RCC campus to promote New Visions. The "Tiger Tailgate parties" have been reasonably effective, if not sufficient to meet recruitment targets fully.

Recognizing that further measures are needed, RCC and RCDPSS currently are in the process of developing several additional promising recruitment strategies. One is to allow RCC to recruit directly from the Phase I client population at Phase I orientations, job clubs, and elsewhere, and to offer work-study jobs as a new way for Phase I volunteers to meet their 20-hour work requirement.[16] In another innovative response, RCC plans to give up to six existing New Visions students work-study jobs as program recruiters. Finally, RCDPSS is adding a mandatory front-end engagement activity for new Phase II clients and is contracting with RCC

[15] RCDPSS obtained forms from only 4,718 clients (17 percent of all GAIN participants) over the first year that the form was in use (April 1999 to April 2000). Of those completing the form, 1,992 (42 percent) indicated an interest in being contacted by RCC, and 3,001 (61 percent) expressed interest in being contacted by any provider.

[16] Until now, RCDPSS has not allowed clients to use work-study jobs to fulfill the 20-hour work requirement, in the belief that unsubsidized employment offers the best route to self-sufficiency. Hence, clients in Phase I job clubs could not volunteer for New Visions until they had found jobs for at least 20 hours a week and entered Phase II.

to provide services to half of the caseload.[17] The Career Club will afford RCC staff substantially improved access to clients for New Visions recruitment.

RCC's level of effort will need to expand substantially if it is to capitalize on these and other new opportunities. Recognizing this, the college is considering hiring additional staff to specialize in recruitment and engaging a professional marketing firm to develop a targeted outreach campaign involving the mass media.

Although RCDPSS Phase II case managers also could make a substantial contribution to New Visions recruitment, their role to date has been limited. New Visions is just one of a number of Phase II services and thus far does not appear to have received substantial emphasis by case managers. RCDPSS wants its case managers to promote education and training in general, but, believing that clients should choose their own services, the agency discourages case managers from referring clients to specific providers. The agency refers to this model as a "push-pull approach," in which Phase II case managers "push" clients to consider E&T and providers "pull" clients into specific programs.

RCDPSS believes that such an approach is the best way to optimize the relationship between the supply of providers and the demand for E&T services. The model gives the welfare agency at least two important functions. One is to stimulate clients' demand for E&T, which the agency believes is vital to clients' long-term job retention and advancement prospects. The other is to promote efficient operation of the E&T market by ensuring that clients have good information about E&T opportunities and that providers have good information about their potential customers.

In line with such policies, we believe that it would be helpful for RCDPSS to provide more explicit guidance on where and how case managers should discuss the benefits of college in general, and New Visions in particular. Case managers could be encouraged to identify clients who can succeed in college, carefully review the benefits of college, and introduce clients to the available program options. In the process, they could provide a substantial amount of information on New Visions and help connect interested clients with RCC staff to learn more about the program. Materials and ongoing briefings from RCC staff, along with internal RCDPSS staff training, would be helpful in reinforcing such efforts.

Second, the message must both ***offer concrete examples of the benefits of college and convince prospective students that college is doable.*** In addition to working through the financial rewards of education, case managers also should emphasize other benefits–such as

[17] RCDPSS plans to randomly assign the remaining half of the caseload to a similar service run by agency staff and measure the relative effectiveness of the two programs.

setting a positive example for children and increasing one's own self-esteem. Stressing the benefits to children may be especially useful, since repercussions on parents' time to be with their children is one of the most significant concerns about programs like New Visions. Although New Visions *tells* potential participants about ways the program will help them to balance school with work and parenting, more creative approaches may be needed to convince those who are interested, but hesitant to participate, in the program. Experience in other programs has shown that it can be very helpful to walk through strategies for meshing school and work schedules, and finding transportation and child care. Transportation is an especially difficult problem in Riverside County, where distances are large and the mass transit infrastructure is stretched thin. Ideally, RCC recruiters would spend time with potential volunteers working out actual plans for transportation and other aspects of coordinating work, education, and family time.

Third, programs like New Visions will be in a better position to convince clients that college is doable to the degree that they ***provide the supports, instruction, and policies that really do make college doable***. RCC and RCDPSS staff recognize the need for additional transportation and child care options and are contemplating ways to better meet students' needs. The New Visions curriculum has been specifically designed to provide both necessary remediation and an introduction to the college environment.

The rules concerning work have been an active subject for discussion. RCC staff argued that on-campus work-study could be a very effective tool for helping New Visions students to balance work and school. RCDPSS managers initially were unwilling to count work-study jobs as fulfilling the 20-hour requirement, believing that unsubsidized employment offers a better platform for job advancement and that excluding work-study earnings from income in grant calculations (as prescribed by CalWORKS policy) amounts to further dependency. However, facing a serious recruitment shortfall, the agency recently agreed to allow Phase I staff to offer work-study on a limited basis to clients interested in New Visions as a way to increase work hours and make them eligible for E&T. RCC's president also has offered to help create a substantial number of temporary, non-work-study jobs on campus and in the nearby community.

Additional measures ultimately may be necessary to convince a significant number of welfare recipients to pursue college. Although RCDPSS policy only requires participants to work 20 hours for New Visions eligibility, financial pressures have led many recipients to work full-time. Providing a cash incentive for college hours to "make school pay" might help to alleviate this pressure and reinforce the message that college is a very valuable activity. Finally, other states and localities may choose to allow recipients to make college their sole TANF activity. Although quite different from Riverside's Work Plus approach, relaxing work requirements may be the only way to engage a significant fraction of the caseload in college.

Lesson 2. Colleges and Welfare Agencies Must Be Prepared To Work Together Closely and Maintain a Flexible Outlook on Program Design and Logistics

Efforts to engage welfare recipients in college require close coordination between welfare agencies and colleges. Welfare agencies hold crucial information on recipients' eligibility and past experiences, control approval of educational activities, and have substantial responsibility for arranging child care and other key supports, in addition to financial assistance. Colleges have substantial expertise in curriculum design and teaching, can expect to play a major role in selling education, and must be prepared to meet monitoring and reporting needs. Both sets of resources must be carefully articulated in special college programs like New Visions.

Achieving a happy marriage between these two institutions can be difficult given welfare policies and a vigorous economy that strongly promote full-time work. Case managers who see their jobs mainly as promoting rapid employment and college instructors who believe that the most effective route to economic advancement lies through intensive schooling may not always agree on the best plan for individual recipients. Welfare rules embody time limits, and the welfare culture focuses on eligibility determination and employment–an ethos whose tone and rhythm are qualitatively different from colleges' tolerance of individual styles of learning and curriculum-driven schedules. Arriving at a workable "Work Plus" strategy in this environment can be very challenging.

From its inception, New Visions has enjoyed very strong support from the leaders of RCC and RCDPSS. However, the process of translating this vision into a concrete program design has not always gone smoothly.

During the program's first year, although senior staff met frequently to discuss policy, planning, and evaluation issues, there was relatively little teamwork at operational levels between the two agencies. As described in the previous section, a variety of factors made it difficult for RCC staff to gain access to eligible clients. Seeking to empower clients to take responsibility for their own education and training, RCDPSS policy discouraged (and continues to discourage) Phase II case managers from steering clients to specific providers. Work Plus was still under development during this period, there were relatively few Phase II case managers, and many Phase I case managers were not inclined to encourage education. Although the plan called for stationing an agency staff member at RCC to facilitate coordination of case management, this did not happen in the first year, and line staff in the two institutions communicated infrequently about the needs of individual clients. RCC staff felt frustrated that the welfare agency was not providing greater support, and believed that recruitment in particular should be a jointly-owned responsibility. The agency adhered strictly to its policy of viewing recruitment as the responsibility of providers.

Thus far, teamwork has improved substantially during the program's second year and both organizations have shown greater flexibility. Most notably, RCC and RCDPSS have forged a strong working partnership to address recruitment issues, with active participation at all staff levels of both organizations. RCC and RCDPSS staff both have recognized the need for more frequent communications, resulting in more frequent visits by RCC staff to the agency to present New Visions to clients and staff. With increased communication, the frequency and quality of case management coordination also have increased.

Senior RCDPSS staff have begun to address changes in policies and incentives needed in order to refocus their agency's goals on job advancement through education. For example, they have conducted focus groups to develop improved marketing strategies, hired more Phase II case managers, organized Phase II staff under a separate coordinator, and developed clearer performance standards to reward staff for engaging clients in E&T.

As mentioned above, RCDPSS staff also have provided several new opportunities for New Visions staff to recruit clients. It remains unclear whether and how the agency will strengthen the contributions of its Phase II case managers to New Visions recruitment. As noted in the previous section, there are many opportunities for case managers to take a more active part, without actually making direct referrals.

The New Visions experience thus far underlines the need for an unusually close collaboration between welfare agencies and educational institutions in mixed-strategy interventions such as New Visions, especially when agency policies make recruitment a difficult sell. Successful partnerships require commitment and good relations at the highest levels where policy and resource decisions are made. They also require effort by line staff at both ends in implementing recruitment strategies and in coordinating case management.

Lesson 3. The New Visions Model Suggests Several Principles for Designing Instructional Programs

Institutions interested in enhancing welfare recipients' career prospects through college should consider building customized instruction into their programs. A special curriculum helps programs to address educational deficiencies in ways that are best suited to welfare recipients' needs and circumstances. RCC administrators believed that a special curriculum was needed because the school's existing courses were not well suited to the instructional needs and learning styles of this population. New Visions' curriculum provides a relatively comprehensive response to training and skill needs, and it is organized in an efficient package and presented using non-traditional teaching methods.

First, similar to other innovative education programs, the New Visions curriculum provides ***non-traditional academic instruction infused with real-world skills training***. As described in Section II, math and English instructors draw applications from work settings, consumer problems, and personal financial planning in developing classroom examples and assignments. Instructors combine lecturing with substantial use of non-traditional methods, including individualized computer instruction and assessment, project-type assignments involving real-world applications, hands-on tasks, instruction in problem-solving skills, and an emphasis on understanding rather than memorization. A class in office administration imparts basic computer and word processing skills required in many job settings. The guidance curriculum trains students in the personal and social skills needed to succeed at work (i.e., SCANS) and college, covering topics such as planning and time management, critical thinking and problem solving, note-taking and study skills, and job search and interviewing skills. After the first 24 weeks, New Visions provides specialized job training through occupational mini-programs designed to lead to entry-level jobs and to more advanced academic work.

Second, the instructional program moves individuals through a series of ***carefully graduated steps***. The New Visions model assumes that reinforcing incremental accomplishments, rather than moving directly into regular program, is the most effective approach for many clients. The program recognizes that reversals are to be expected and works to encourage clients to try again. This philosophy resembles that of Chicago's Project Match, which popularized the "steps to self-sufficiency ladder" metaphor in welfare-to-work programs.

Program staff work with each participant to establish career goals and identify the discrete steps leading to achievement of these goals. Staff recognize that individuals' abilities and needs vary and that different end-points and outcomes from the program are inevitable. The division of the core training sequence into six-week, credit-earning sessions helps to create a sense of progress. Students who drop out of the program are allowed to re-enroll without waiting out the normal 18-week semester. New Visions' fluid, self-paced curriculum, and its careful record of assignments and test results, facilitate clients' re-entry at appropriate points in the program. Transcripts build a record of credits earned, which contributes to participants' self-esteem and sends a positive message to employers.[18] New Visions also awards certificates and holds a graduation ceremony after participants complete basic training.

Third, the New Visions experience affirms that working effectively with students from disadvantaged backgrounds requires ***accommodating and dedicated faculty and counselors***. Compared with other college students, welfare recipients have greater needs for academic

[18] Although New Visions courses are an official part of the RCC curriculum, credits for remedial courses for the most part do not count towards regular degree programs. The exception is New Visions' guidance course, which does count as regular academic credit.

remediation. Also, a majority are single parents, facing substantially greater responsibilities associated with the support and care of their children. Instructors have had to advance their classes as a group while supporting individuals working at varying paces. This emphasis on individualized instruction requires intensive effort, as does helping students to negotiate complicated personal, family, and work situations. Most regular college faculty have not spent time with welfare recipients as a group and may not be able or willing to devote substantial time to providing the intensive, individualized attention or developing specialized curricula. Initial observation, and comments from students reported in the next section, suggest that New Visions instructors and counselors are exceptionally enthusiastic and well-qualified.

A final observation is that the instructional program should both ***require students to be disciplined and recognize the need for flexibility in individual situations***. Much welfare policy today seeks to promote "personal responsibility" through universal requirements and a uniform set of employment services. The New Visions model is based on the belief that responsibility can be instilled by providing a structured environment with clear academic standards–one that accommodates differences in learning abilities and supports individuals' efforts to manage school, work, and family obligations.

New Visions expects students to complete assignments, sit for exams, and function within the general institutional rules governing the college. The curriculum incorporates SCANS skills and teaches students how to function effectively in a college environment. The program monitors attendance and coordinates with RCDPSS to ensure that total work and school hours equal at least 32 hours a week.

At the same time, the program is very flexible in accommodating individual needs and circumstances. Class schedules allow participants to pick time slots that fit their work and family needs, and to change time slots over the course of the program as needs change or emergencies arise. Much of the curriculum is self-paced, allowing for different rates of progress within courses. When several members of one cohort demonstrated high English test scores, staff moved them directly into a higher level class in the regular curriculum. Clients who drop out are encouraged to re-enroll at an appropriate stage in the program.

An important caveat is that it is likely to be much more difficult to sustain the current level of individualized instruction if enrollment increases to the levels originally expected. Also, at the current enrollment levels, the program's impacts reflect a fairly intensive investment in each student.

Lesson 4. An Encouraging Environment and Strong Supportive Services Are Key to Success

Programs like New Visions expect a lot from those they seek to help, mostly single parents who already are struggling to hold down low-wage jobs, pay their bills, and find time for their children. The demands of college class work and studying impose a difficult additional burden in terms of time and energy, and transportation and child care needs.

Several things make it difficult for New Visions participants to balance school with work and child care. Although the program requires only 20 hours of work a week, many clients feel they must work full-time in order to meet their children's needs. Longer work hours lead to needs for hard-to-find evening child care. Demanding schedules can make it nearly impossible to get places on time using public transportation. Clients who do not own a car and those who cannot arrange evening child care with a friend or relative are at a particular disadvantage.

In addition to providing academic instruction, helping clients to manage these multiple responsibilities is a central goal of New Visions. To date, the program has tried to help participants make the school-work-child care triangle possible through a combination of intensive case management and supportive services. New Visions counselors help students find and manage workable transportation and child care packages. GAIN supports some of the financial costs of supportive services, and RCC augments this assistance using CalWORKS grant monies for New Visions.

Our early observations indicate that New Visions has provided substantial help in managing these challenges. Counselors, along with the program's financial aid and job development specialists, spend a great deal of time helping individual students solve logistical problems and access resources at RCC and in the community. The program's guidance class offers hands-on instruction in relevant skills, such as goal setting, problem solving, and time management.

At least as important as the formal instruction and supportive services has been New Visions' encouraging social environment. The program's on-campus, but separate, facilities create a safe buffer between the outside world and RCC's regular programs. New Visions staff have engendered a warm and friendly atmosphere. Both staff and students hail the program's strong supportive peer culture as one of New Vision's most important features. Strong bonds between students help to reinforce commitment to school, stimulate exchange of information on resources and problem-solving strategies, and provide concrete assistance with transportation and other needs.

New Visions' guidance course has played a strong role in creating this peer culture. Cited by staff as "the glue that holds the program together," this class offers varied opportunities

for students to share experiences and provide mutual support in a guided setting. The class is very popular with students, who credit it with giving them both the confidence and skills to succeed in the program.

Notwithstanding such achievements, our general impression is that New Visions and similar programs will need to substantially expand efforts to help students balance school with their work and parenting responsibilities if they are to reach more than a narrow sliver of the caseload. Retention also appears to be problematic, especially in the early weeks of program participation. Although we have not yet had a chance to examine the retention problem closely, it seems likely that strengthened supports are needed here as well.

Thus far, New Visions has relied primarily on case management in helping participants balance their various responsibilities. Recruitment and retention difficulties suggest additional supports are needed. The decision to use work-study jobs will contribute to alleviating transportation barriers and, given the right kinds of positions, may strengthen substantive connections between work and classroom instruction. Good on-campus child care would be a further step towards solving transportation problems and perhaps also would leave parents feeling more secure in their child care arrangements. Another idea, which has been used at other colleges, is to arrange special housing for program participants, either on or near the campus. All, or any one, of these mechanisms might help New Visions to strengthen the synergies between work and school, address transportation barriers, and reduce participants' worries about their children's well-being.

IV. EARLY EXPERIENCES OF NEW VISIONS VOLUNTEERS

This section examines the experiences of clients randomly assigned to treatment and control groups in 1998-1999, when New Visions was in its pilot phase. Specifically, we examine characteristics of volunteers and their reasons for volunteering, experiences in the program, and short-term economic and educational outcomes.

The available data allow us to formulate only preliminary impressions of what may be happening to New Visions participants. Sample sizes are too small (70 treatment and 73 control clients) and the follow-up interval is too short (an average of 12 months after random assignment) to support firm conclusions. Also, the services received by both the treatment and control groups still were evolving during the pilot phase. As discussed in the previous section, New Visions' core instructional program was in place, but occupational mini-programs and other features were not fully developed. At RCDPSS, the transition to Work Plus had just begun, and Phase II services also were not fully developed.

Who is Eligible for New Visions, and Who Volunteers?

In order to be eligible for New Visions, clients must have a high school diploma or GED and be working at least 20 hours per week in an unsubsidized job. At any given time during the program's first year, Exhibit 1 shows that only 15 percent of the caseload, or 2,300 clients, met New Visions' work and education requirements.[19] The number of potential New Visions recruits is even smaller than this, however, since only half of the 15 percent lives in the RCC catchment area (not shown in exhibit). With this geographic restriction, the 143 clients who volunteered for New Visions in 1998-1999 represent about one-tenth of the eligible population.

As mentioned in Section III, RCC and RCDPSS are considering expanding eligibility as one response to program recruitment difficulties. Other slices of the pie in Exhibit 1 suggest the magnitude of the potential gains from modifying New Visions' work and education requirements. Targeting clients working less than 20 hours a week who have a high school diploma or GED will provide access to an additional 37 percent of the caseload within the RCC catchment area. Remaining are 13 percent who meet only the work (but not the education) standards, and 35 percent who meet neither standard. RCC is considering recruiting clients without high school credentials whose test scores indicate they are close to GED-ready. Although we have no data on GED-readiness, we do know that 10 percent of those without high school degrees completed 12 years of school, and 37 percent completed 11 years of school.

As shown in Exhibit 2, nearly all New Visions volunteers were female single parents. Although program rules require all to be employed, most were working part-time at low-wage jobs and had been on welfare continuously for at least a year.

Examining the differences between the characteristics of New Visions volunteers and other clients may provide insights into the special service needs and participation barriers of the population most likely to volunteer for the program. Differences between New Visions participants and other clients may stem from the program's eligibility restrictions or from factors that prompt some, but not other, eligible clients to volunteer.

The effects of current eligibility rules can be inferred by comparing eligible and ineligible clients. Exhibit 2 shows percentages with selected characteristics among eligible clients who did not volunteer for New Visions (second bar in each set) and ineligible clients third bar).[20]

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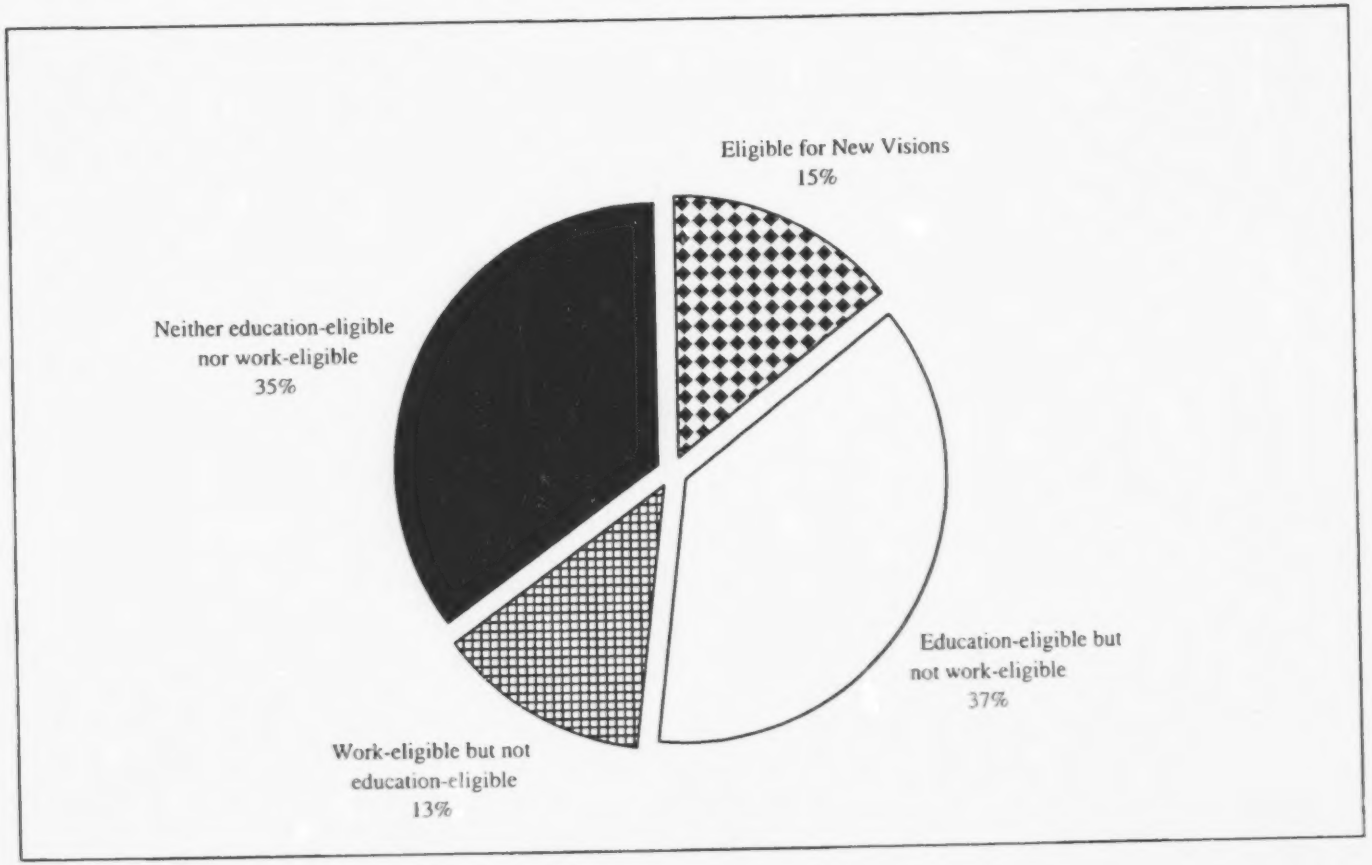
[19] These statistics are for January 1999, the middle of the first enrollment year. The total TANF caseload in January 1999 was 22,079 adults, but educational attainment was unknown for 6,233 of these individuals. The proportions in this paragraph and Exhibit 1 are based on the 15,846 clients whose educational attainment is known.

[20] The sample of eligible non-volunteers includes clients who met New Visions' work and education criteria but lived outside the RCC catchment area.

Exhibit 1
New Visions Eligibility Status of Adult TANF Recipients in Riverside County, January 1999



Source: Analysis of Riverside County DPSS administrative data.
Note: Based on caseload of 15,846 adults, which excludes 6,233 adults whose educational attainment is unknown.

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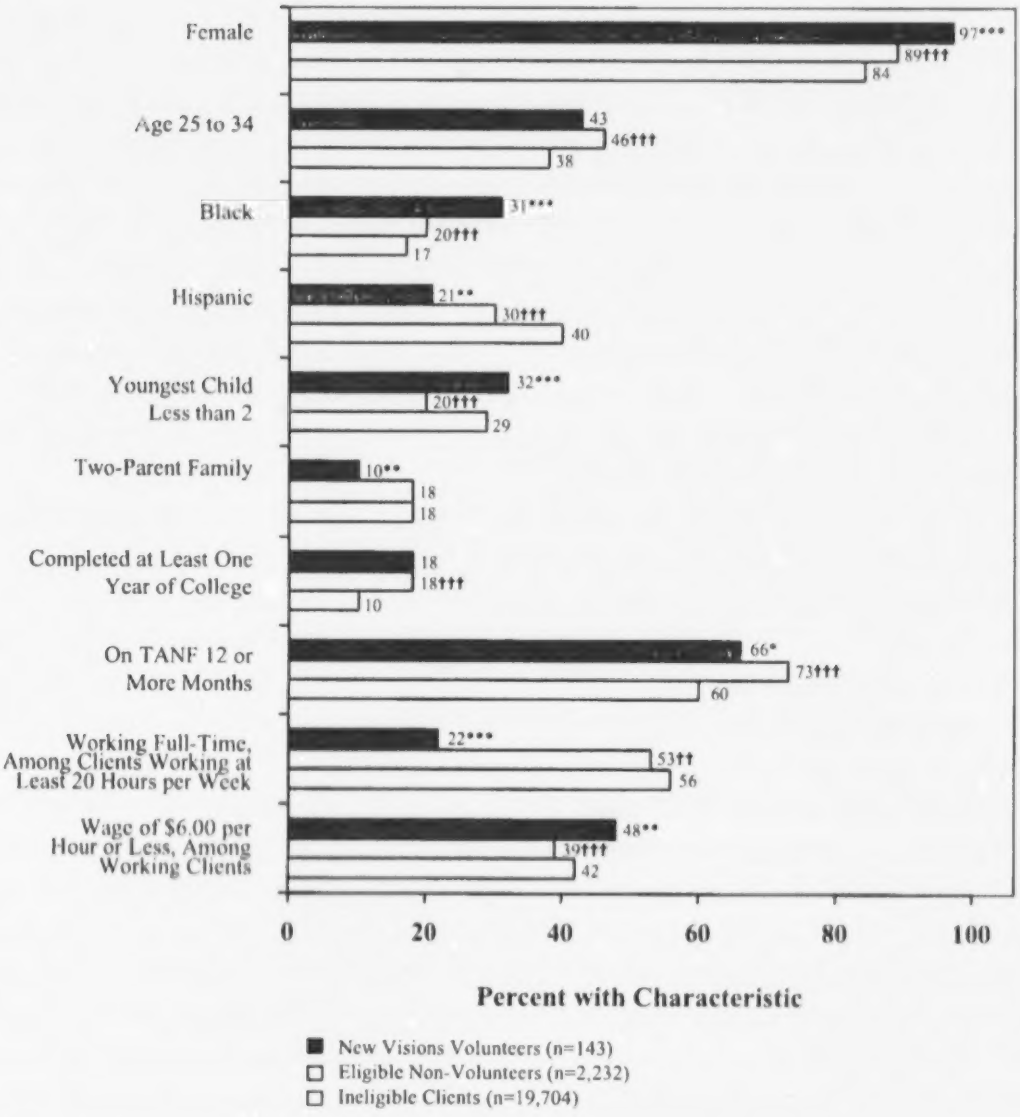
Exhibit 2
Percent Having Selected Characteristics Among Members of the New Visions Pilot Cohort, Eligible Non-Volunteers, and Ineligible Clients[a]



Source: DPSS administrative records.

[a]Characteristics are as of the month classes started, for New Visions volunteers, and as of January 1999 for other clients.

*** Percentage distribution between volunteers and eligible non-volunteers statistically different at the 1-percent level; **at the 5-percent level; * at the 10-percent level.

††† Percentage distribution between eligible clients (volunteers and eligible non-volunteers combined) and ineligible clients statistically different at the 1-percent level; †† at the 5-percent level; † at the 10-percent level.

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The exhibit also shows the same characteristics for New Visions volunteers (first bar). The findings suggest that work and education requirements are linked to a number of other characteristics. The largest differences are that, compared with ineligible clients, eligible clients are:

- *more* likely to be *25 to 34 years old*;
- *less* likely to be *Hispanic*;
- *less* likely to have *children under age two*;
- *more* likely to have *completed at least one year of college;* and
- *more* likely to have *been on TANF a year or more.*

For the most part, the sources of linkages between these characteristics and work and education are clear. For example, differences in the percent who are Hispanic and who have young children suggest that language difficulties and child care concerns may impede educational attainment and employment.

A second comparison in Exhibit 2 shows characteristics affecting the propensity to volunteer for New Visions. The biggest difference between volunteers (top bar) and eligible non-volunteers (second bar) is that volunteers are much less likely to be working full-time than the typical eligible client. This finding suggests that clients in part-time jobs may feel better able to take on the additional time demands of school, or may be in lower quality jobs (as evidenced by volunteers' lower wages in Exhibit 2) and therefore have a stronger incentive to improve their employment prospects through education. Compared with eligible non-volunteers, volunteers also are:

- *more* likely to be *female* and *less* likely to be from a *two-parent family*;
- *more* likely to be *black* and *less* likely to be *Hispanic*; and
- *more* likely to have a *child under age two.*

These demographic differences may be another reflection of volunteers' lower average work hours. In addition, the relatively small number of Hispanic volunteers may suggest also that language barriers discourage some eligible clients from volunteering.

These findings have two possible uses in shaping recruitment strategies. One response might be to concentrate effort on populations most likely to participate. Another would be to address barriers to participation for those who have been less likely to participate. Providing additional financial assistance to allow clients to work part-time and strengthening outreach and English language assistance for limited English-speaking Hispanic clients are two examples of ways barriers might be addressed.

Reasons for Volunteering

We obtained more direct information on reasons for volunteering through questions on a specially designed Background Information Form (BIF) that all volunteers (treatment and control) completed at intake. One BIF item asked clients to indicate their main reason for volunteering for New Visions. The largest single fraction (41 percent) said that their primary motivation was to obtain a regular college degree or certificate (see top panel, Exhibit 3). Large fractions also said that their main reason for volunteering was to get help finding a better paying (37 percent) or a full-time (11 percent) job. Very few (three percent) viewed New Visions as a way to "test the waters" to see if college was right for them, suggesting that most volunteered in order to get help with something they already knew they wanted to do.

A second BIF item asked what volunteers expected to be doing in one year, a time period long enough that treatment group members would have completed New Visions. Nearly four-in-five volunteers expected to be attending college, and nearly all of these clients also expected to be working–either full-time (58 percent) or part-time (20 percent)–while they were in school. These expectations are highly consistent with New Visions' goal of fostering longer term college participation among working recipients.

Comments from a discussion with four New Visions participants suggest that the program has helped clients take the first step towards a goal that hitherto had eluded them:

> *I always wanted to go [to college]. The alternative is having to work at two jobs that I will never leave.*

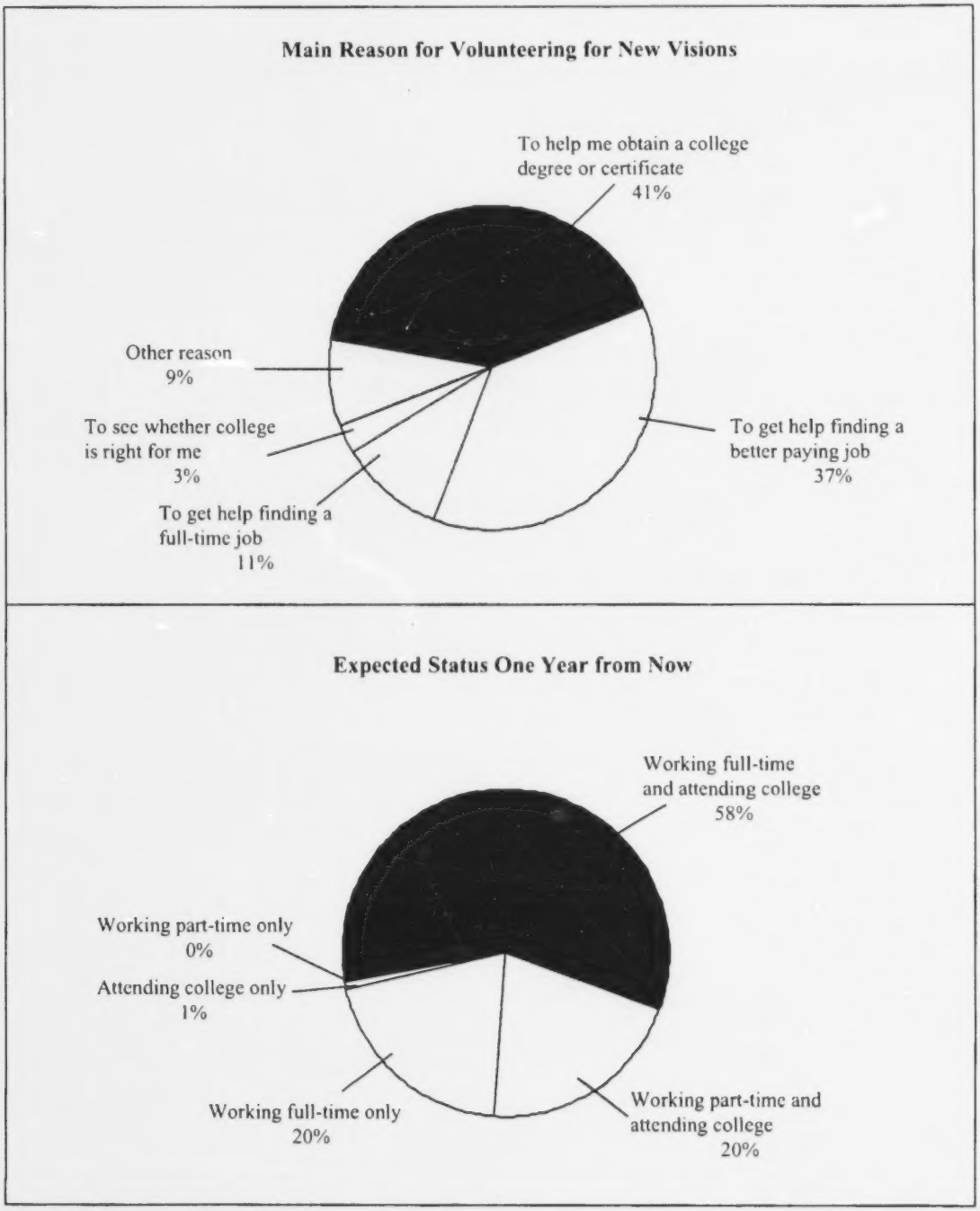
> *I had been out of school for 10 years. The adjustment would have been hard [without New Visions]. This is smaller... a stepping stone.*

Statistics from another BIF item indicate that volunteers faced serious barriers to attending college. Two-thirds identified two or more barriers and only nine percent indicated they faced no barriers, from a list of four barriers (not shown in exhibit). The most prevalent concern was affording college, cited by 65 percent of volunteers. Many volunteers also indicated concerns about how they would manage child care and transportation, and their state of academic readiness. Small group discussion participants emphasized that it was important to mention these services in recruitment efforts:

> *[Tell them about] having a support system, a trust network.*

> *The child care is the biggest thing.*

Exhibit 3
Motives and Expectations of New Visions Volunteers at Random Assignment
(Treatment and Control Groups Combined)


Main Reason for Volunteering for New Visions
To help me obtain a college degree or certificate 41%
To get help finding a better paying job 37%
To get help finding a full-time job 11%
To see whether college is right for me 3%
Other reason 9%
Expected Status One Year from Now
Working full-time and attending college 58%
Working part-time and attending college 20%
Working full-time only 20%
Attending college only 1%
Working part-time only 0%

Source: Tabulations from the New Visions Background Information Form (n=143).

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[Give them] more detail on what opportunities are here; what you can do and where it will lead.

The best sales [approach is to show them] someone who's made it.

Although college classes and supportive services are free to New Visions participants (and other CalWORKS students), the prominence of concerns about costs may reflect recipients' sense that they would have to reduce their work hours–and earnings–in order to succeed in school. Helping to offset these costs through special grant supplements to "make school pay" might make it easier for participants to manage school and work and increase the program's attractiveness to potential volunteers. Participants also suggested two other ways the program might strengthen supportive services:

[N]ot seeing [your] kids all day is difficult... having day care here would be good.

The buses don't run at 9:00 when classes end...couldn't they run a van?

Finally, one small group discussion participant first heard about New Visions from her GAIN case manager, another from a friend, and another through a flier in the mail. Thus, even for a small sample, it is clear that information about the program reached them through varying channels. Such impressions bolster the argument in Section III for using multiple avenues of communication in recruitment efforts.

Employment and Training Experiences

To grasp what New Visions meant to participants during the program's pilot phase, it is instructive to see how their activities compare with those of control group members. Although the latter were not allowed to enroll in New Visions, they were eligible for other RCDPSS Phase II E&T services.

By November 1999, a year after random assignment for the average sample member, RCDPSS administrative data systems showed that 85 percent of the treatment group, but only 25 percent of the control group, had been assigned to education or training activities (see Exhibit 4).[21] Notwithstanding the general policy to encourage education and training in Phase II, most

[21] These figures undercount the proportion of clients assigned to employment and training activities by GAIN staff, because not every assignment is recorded in GAIN administrative records. For example, although GAIN staff assigned all treatment group members to New Visions, administrative records show only 85 percent of treatment group members assigned. Treatment-control differences in Exhibits 4 and 5 were regression-adjusted to account for chance differences in characteristics as of random assignment, based on data from the Background Information Form. The characteristics used in the regression adjustment are whether a client: has 3 or more children; was ever married; is black; is Hispanic; has any previous college experience; has a youngest child under 3; has a youngest child between 3 and 6; worked 0 to 6 months out of the last 24; worked 7 to 12 months out of the last 24; received TANF for 24 to 35 of the past 60 months; received TANF for 36 to 59 of the past 60 months; received TANF for all of the past 60 months.

Exhibit 4
Selected Employment and Training Experiences of New Visions Volunteers Between Random Assignment and November 1999

Activity	Treatment Group	Control Group	Difference
Percent Ever Assigned to Education or Training Activity			
New Visions	85.6[a]	0.0	85.6***
Other education or training activity	11.3	24.8	-13.5*
Any education or training activity	84.8	25.5	59.3***
Percent Ever Assigned to a Work Activity			
Job search	32.0	48.7	-16.7*
Other work activity	6.3	4.9	1.3
Any work activity	33.1	50.5	-17.4**
Average Number of Credits Earned at RCC	6.7	2.3	4.4***
Percent Completing New Visions Core Curriculum			
Among all volunteers	52.9	n.a.	n.a.
Among volunteers who attended orientation (n=55)	67.3	n.a.	n.a.
Percent Enrolling in Occupational Mini-Programs			
Among all volunteers	11.4	n.a.	n.a.
Among students completing the core curriculum (n=37)	22.6	n.a.	n.a.
Sample Size	70	73	

Source: Abt analysis of administrative records from Riverside County DPSS and RCC.

[a] Although all 70 treatment group members were assigned, the GAIN automated E&T assignment system showed only 60 treatment group members assigned to New Visions. It is possible that GAIN staff did not enter assignments for some clients already meeting the work participation requirement through employment.

A two-tailed t-test was applied to differences between the treatment and control groups. Statistical significance levels are indicated as: ***= 1 percent; **= 5 percent; and *= 10 percent.

Phase II clients clients were not participating in such activities during this period, and the New Visions control group's experience appears typical in this regard.[22]

Not surprisingly, the treatment group earned more semester credits and logged more hours of instruction at RCC than the control group. In the four semesters from fall 1998 through fall 1999, the average number of credits completed was 6.7 for treatment group members and 2.3 for control group members, a statistically significant difference of 4.4 credits.[23] The four-credit difference implies that the treatment group received 79 more hours of actual classroom instruction than the control group.[24]

Although important, differences in credits and instruction hours do not give a complete picture of the educational experiences of the two groups, as they do not take account of differences in the quality of instruction and guidance received. The evaluation will analyze a wider range of measures of educational outcomes in future reports. Meanwhile, comments from our small group discussion indicate that New Visions participants liked the academic and guidance classes very much:

[I like the training in] computers... English and math are both good refreshers.

The classes and teachers couldn't be better!

[The instructor is] a dream teacher come true!

I have a sense of going somewhere, that there's a reward at the end. I discovered that my brain hadn't turned to mush.

I like the support group here. You get to know a bit about each other, meet new people.

In June 1999, New Visions staff administered a brief survey to ten students who had completed the core program. As in the small group discussion, respondents were very satisfied with the program overall, and especially with the computer, math, and English instruction they had received. Respondents were less positive about job placement assistance, which may not have been as well-developed during the program's pilot phase.

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[22] Personal communication with John Rodgers, March 2000.

[23] These averages include all sample members who earned zero credit. Restricting the comparison only to clients who were enrolled at RCC, the average total number of credits earned did not differ statistically between treatment (9.1 credits) and control (11.3 credits) group members. Hence, the overall difference reflects the fact that New Visions engaged more recipients in college, rather than greater achievement among those who attended.

[24] This estimate assumes that each credit hour represents 18 hours of instruction, an estimate provided by RCC staff.

Impressions from two small group discussions suggest that the program environment has helped New Visions students to balance work, school, and child care burdens with greater equanimity than a group of other RCDPSS Phase II clients who were attending college. There were clear differences in the ways members of the two groups said going to school had affected their parenting experiences:

- *All **members of the non-New Visions group** said that their extra college work had introduced very high levels of anxiety and stress into their relationships with their children. The chief source of stress was the loss of time to be with their children and look after their children's needs. Specific problems mentioned included continual anger and resentment from children, parents' difficulties in managing their own guilt and anger, increased child behavior problems, and an inability to be an effective advocate with their children's school.*

- *Although **New Visions students** also acknowledged feelings of sadness about not being able to spend more time with their children, they exhibited little, if any, stress or bitterness in our discussion. Rather, the New Visions students appeared to have made peace with the fact that a temporary sacrifice was needed in order to achieve longer term gains, and to have found ways of juggling school, work, and parenting that avoided extreme stress.*

Although the contrast between the two groups was striking, the samples are too small and the evidence far too anecdotal to support a strong conclusion about program impacts. It does seem, however, that reduced stress associated with parenting is a topic worthy of more formal measurement in the evaluation.

Overall, about half (53 percent) of first-year volunteers finished New Visions' core program (see Exhibit 4). Among the 55 volunteers who attended the New Visions orientation, the completion rate (67 percent) was even higher.

Occupational mini-programs were designed as the principal way New Visions would make pathways to further college studies. However, as mentioned in Section III, staff did not develop this component very fully in the program's first year. Only about two-tenths (22 percent) of clients completing the core program enrolled in an occupational mini-program.

Early Program Outcomes

As a mixed-strategy program, New Visions might help some recipients move to better jobs in the short-run, while leading others to postpone job advancement to concentrate on their studies. Statistics for the pilot group provide only hints about short-term effects, since the

sample is small and experiences apply to a period in which services were not fully developed. During this period, New Visions only had begun to utilize its occupational mini-programs and job development services, and RCDPSS was just beginning to develop its other Phase II services.

Statistics in the previous section suggest that, as expected, the treatment group spent substantially more time in education and training than the control group during the 12 months after random assignment. Their greater involvement in E&T may explain why treatment group members were more likely to be still receiving TANF in the fourth quarter of 1999 (85 percent) than control group members (72 percent, see Exhibit 5). The treatment-control difference in average grant payment amounts ($82) is not statistically significant.

We have not yet been able to collect data on employment outcomes for all participants needed for experimental comparisons. Non-experimental comparisons for participants receiving welfare in November 1999 hint that New Visions may have led participants to reduce their work hours somewhat (not shown in exhibit), but sample sizes are too small to support a confident determination of whether this is the case.

Early statistics do not suggest much difference in college enrollment in the school terms immediately following the period that students tended to finish the New Visions' core instruction. Although the percentage of treatment group members enrolled in RCC in either the summer or fall 1999 semesters (29 percent) was larger than the corresponding percentage of control group members (21 percent), the difference is not statistically significant. By Fall 1999, somewhat fewer treatment than control group members were enrolled in RCC, although again, the difference is not statistically significant. These findings suggest that the program may need to take a more aggressive approach to steering clients to regular programs during the 24-week core component. Since the pilot phase, New Visions staff have concentrated more on linking participants to occupational mini-programs, which creates more potential for an impact on college enrollment.

Pre-post information suggests that New Visions helped some participants to become better prepared academically. New Visions staff administered several assessment tests at the beginning and end of the program's 24-week core training period. Results from the Test of Adult Basic English (TABE) suggest a significant gain in math comprehension for participants who finished the core program, with average scores boosted from the fifth-grade to tenth-grade levels (see Exhibit 6). Findings from a second test focusing on computer knowledge show large gains in knowledge of basic concepts pertaining to computer systems. These findings must be regarded as tentative, as they apply to a small subgroup of participants, and comparable measures were not obtained for the control group.

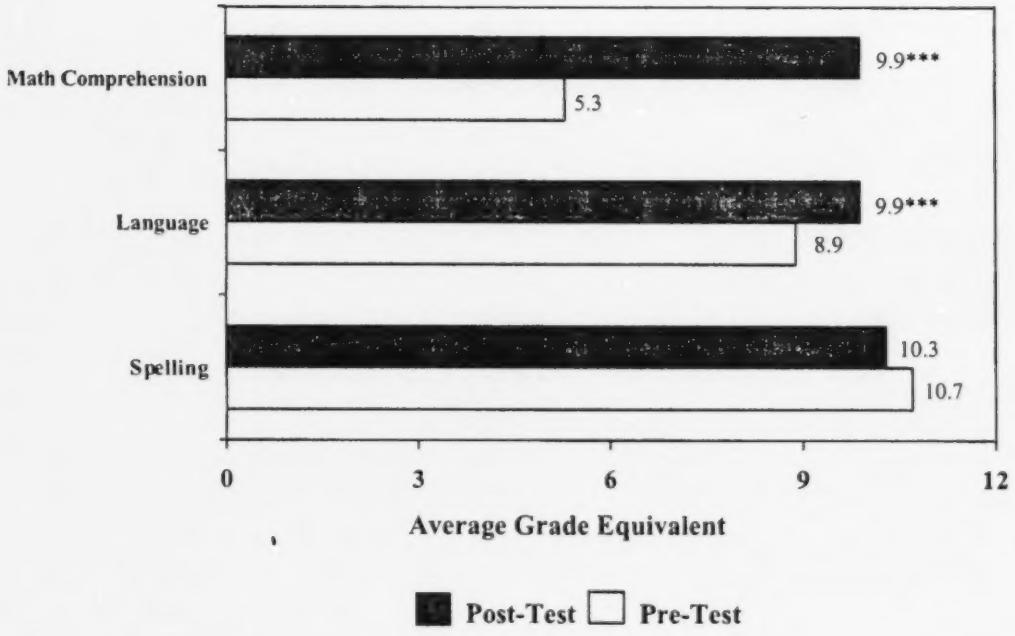
Exhibit 5
TANF Receipt and RCC Enrollment Status
By Treatment-Control Status:
New Visions Pilot Cohort

Outcome	Treatment Group	Control Group	Difference
Received a TANF Payment in Fourth Quarter of 1999	85.0%	71.9%	13.1%*
Average Total TANF Grant Amount in Fourth Quarter of 1999	$818	$736	$82
Enrolled at RCC			
Summer 1999	25.8%	9.6%	16.1**
Fall 1999	12.9	19.2	-6.3
Summer 1999 or Fall 1999	28.6	20.6	8.0
Sample size	70	73	

Source: Abt analysis of administrative records from Riverside County DPSS and RCC.

A two-tailed t-test was applied to regression-adjusted differences between the treatment and control groups. Statistical significance levels are indicated as: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; and * = 10 percent.

Exhibit 6
Pre- and Post-Test Adult Basic English Scores for 31 New Visions Treatment Group Members Completing the Core Program



Source: Abt analysis of RCC-administered test.

A two-tailed t-test was applied to pre-post differences. Statistical significance levels are indicated as: *** =1 percent; ** = 5 percent; and * = 10 percent.

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V. CONCLUSIONS

Special programs to engage welfare recipients in college hold considerable promise as a job advancement strategy, and yet there has been relatively little formal evaluation of emerging models. This report has introduced the first random assignment study of such a program. Developed in Riverside County, California, the New Visions demonstration is testing a mixed-strategy program of customized instruction and supports aiming to engage welfare recipients in community college after the welfare agency has helped them find employment.

Innovative programs often take several years to reach their steady states, and New Visions has been no exception. After a year and a half of operations, a number of key features of the program were in place, whereas others still were developing. It is a useful juncture to take stock of the program's early successes and remaining challenges.

On several fronts, the New Visions partners made notable early strides during the program's first 18 months. Perhaps most important is that RCC and RCDPSS have established a productive working partnership–a key requirement for successful welfare-education initiatives. The two organizations have demonstrated a strong mutual commitment to the program's success. RCC and RCDPSS have made substantial progress in working closely as a team in areas of joint responsibility. The partners now face the substantial challenge of sustaining this cooperation as they work to address recruitment shortfalls. In doing so, they must continue to maintain a willingness to be flexible and rethink policies and practices where needed to strengthen the program.

A second important achievement has been the development of a strong core program of academic remediation and real-world skills. The basic New Visions instructional program successfully integrates academic instruction with job- and life-skills development, moves students along through a manageable series of steps, offers a skillful and dedicated faculty, and provides highly individualized assistance.

A third clear success has been that RCC has created a highly supportive social environment for New Visions students. Although less tangible than some other outcomes, a cohesive and motivating environment is an important attribute of successful social programs. New Visions' comfortable, on-campus location and encouraging staff provide a supportive buffer zone between challenging home and work situations and the additional demands of the regular college environment. The program's well-crafted guidance program creates strong bonds among students that strengthen their commitment to the program.

At this writing, the program still faced several major challenges. The primary challenge is to meet New Visions' recruitment goals. Success in recruitment is needed to fully utilize program capacity, demonstrate that the program has appeal for a significant share of the caseload, and meet the evaluation's sample requirements. Efforts to date have generated a steady inflow of new students, but the numbers represent a small fraction of all eligible recipients and fall well

short of recruitment targets. There remain significant opportunities for expanding outreach, and a number of these currently are under active development at RCC and RCDPSS.

A second need is to strengthen existing supports to help participants balance work, family, and school. Although students appear to benefit from existing case management and supportive services, the rigors of managing the school-work-home-child care circuit remain burdensome, deterring many from accepting the New Visions offer. Thus, addressing this need likely will help convince potential volunteers that New Visions is *doable*, and will promote student retention. One type of response would help recipients manage their existing circuits; for example, by providing more effective transportation assistance. Another kind of response would provide opportunities to revise components of the circuit itself; for instance, by helping participants to move their jobs, child care, and residences closer to RCC, or even onto the campus (e.g., work-study, on-campus child care).

A final critical need is to strengthen the bridge between New Visions' core program and other programs at RCC and other colleges. There has been progress on this front in the second year, as New Visions staff have expanded connections to more RCC occupational mini-programs and RCDPSS case managers have approved more New Visions placement recommendations. As students complete the core program, many will want to act on better–and more demanding–job opportunities, making it potentially harder for them to continue in school. Helping participants to continue the juggling act after they complete the core program will require a more coherent set of academic placement and retention services, and extended collaboration with RCDPSS case managers.

In New Visions, the Riverside partners have implemented an innovative program with many strong features. Because RCC and RCDPSS built a rigorous evaluation into the design, we expect the lessons from New Visions will be of wide interest.

We hope that this early report will help to stimulate reflection on how other states and localities might create pathways to college that reflect their own policy and economic climates. It seems likely that varying program models will be of interest. For example, in low-benefit states, efforts are more likely to focus on former TANF recipients than in high-benefit states, since many recipients will become ineligible for cash benefits after they go to work. Programs in states that allow college as the sole TANF activity are likely to adopt very different approaches to recruitment and work services than those that require some threshold time commitment to work activities. With little presently known about special college programs generally, studies of a wider range of approaches would be very useful.

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